the Dragon
universe
ABLAZE

the Dragon universe

This book is dedicated to Angus McBride.

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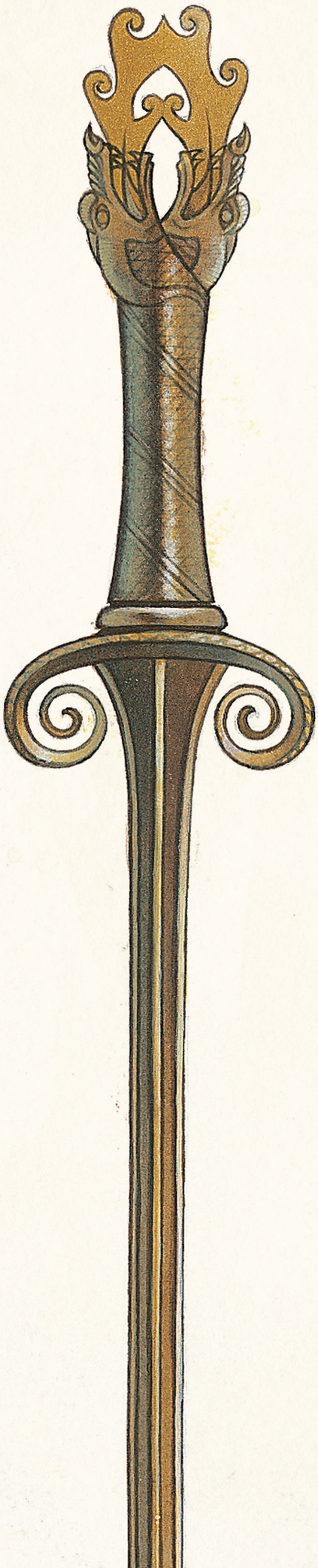
INTRODUCTION

Gather around, my friends, if you love dragons!
Open your eyes wide and turn the pages of this fabulous book!
You will enter their world and I can
guarantee it'll change you forever.

Through these colorful characters' eyes and stories,
you will discover that dragons are not stupid beasts, but
magnificent creatures of remarkable intelligence and
exceptional strength. You'll learn that for thousands
of years ancient dragons lived in perfect harmony with
the first elves in the heart of the majestic forests.
Dwarves, humans, and orcs did not emerge until much later.
You'll realize how complex dragons are. Swinging
between kindness and cruelty, the most evil among
them don't hesitate to destroy extravagant kingdoms
and slaughter their populations to seize their wealth.

You may be saddened to hear that from north to south and
west to east, the dragon race is completely dying out.

My friends, I gravely fear the time of the
dragons is coming to an end...



PART ONE

CHRONICLES OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

The Chamberlain

The night tortures me yet again, I cannot find any peace of mind in slumber. I am here watching my lord, one of his claws furiously hitting the marble of his bed, the somber thoughts that worry him seem to dominate his whole being! What despair dwells in my lord's soul? Just imagining this fills me with dread...

Three days ago, I contemplated in astonishment the dreadful power that dwells in this being, so gentle and wise, all things considered. I never could have imagined that anger might overwhelm him one day! When I introduced the delegation of eastern lands to the room where my master was sitting, going against all the rules of hospitality, he received them coldly. Somewhat confused, I withdrew as etiquette dictated, leaving them alone with my lord. During the night, I woke up terrified and bathed in sweat, the cries of horror echoed in the corridors...

They were the last words of Alderic, grand chamberlain of the Dragon Lord of Westfol. No one knows what happened to him.

The dragons ruled the world with the wisdom and reason that only other ancient and honorable creatures could offer.

But for some time now, what we had named the Golden Age with great pride seems to be crumbling on all sides. Hordes of orcs and goblins arose from the desert and roam the prairie in broad daylight, bringing war and death to all who stand in their way. The Dwarves sealed the gates of their kingdoms under the mountains behind them and seem to have retreated from the world, but their threatening, greedy and warlike nature will undoubtedly make terrifying tombs of their wonderful cities. The men go to war, chivalry only a fading memory as age-old alliances are torn apart by infighting and disgraceful civil disputes. The Elves, too few in number, have regained their sky kingdoms, but their spells, as powerful as they are, gradually fade away and won't protect them much longer. As for us chosen people, wise among the wise, a strange scourge decimates us, a real pestilence attacks us. The universe is collapsing on itself, the world is already trembling and will soon sink into chaos, for this insidious evil removes part of our soul from us, bringing us back to the ranks of savage and cruel beasts, and no one will be able to stand up to the madness of the dragons.

Thorn Embar, Dragon Lord of Westfol

A blazing fire was slowly dying in the fireplace. Piles of books of all kinds, scrolls of parchment yellowed by time and stacks of dusty leaflets, relics of much older works, were most certainly arranged with a consummate art of balance on the little desk.

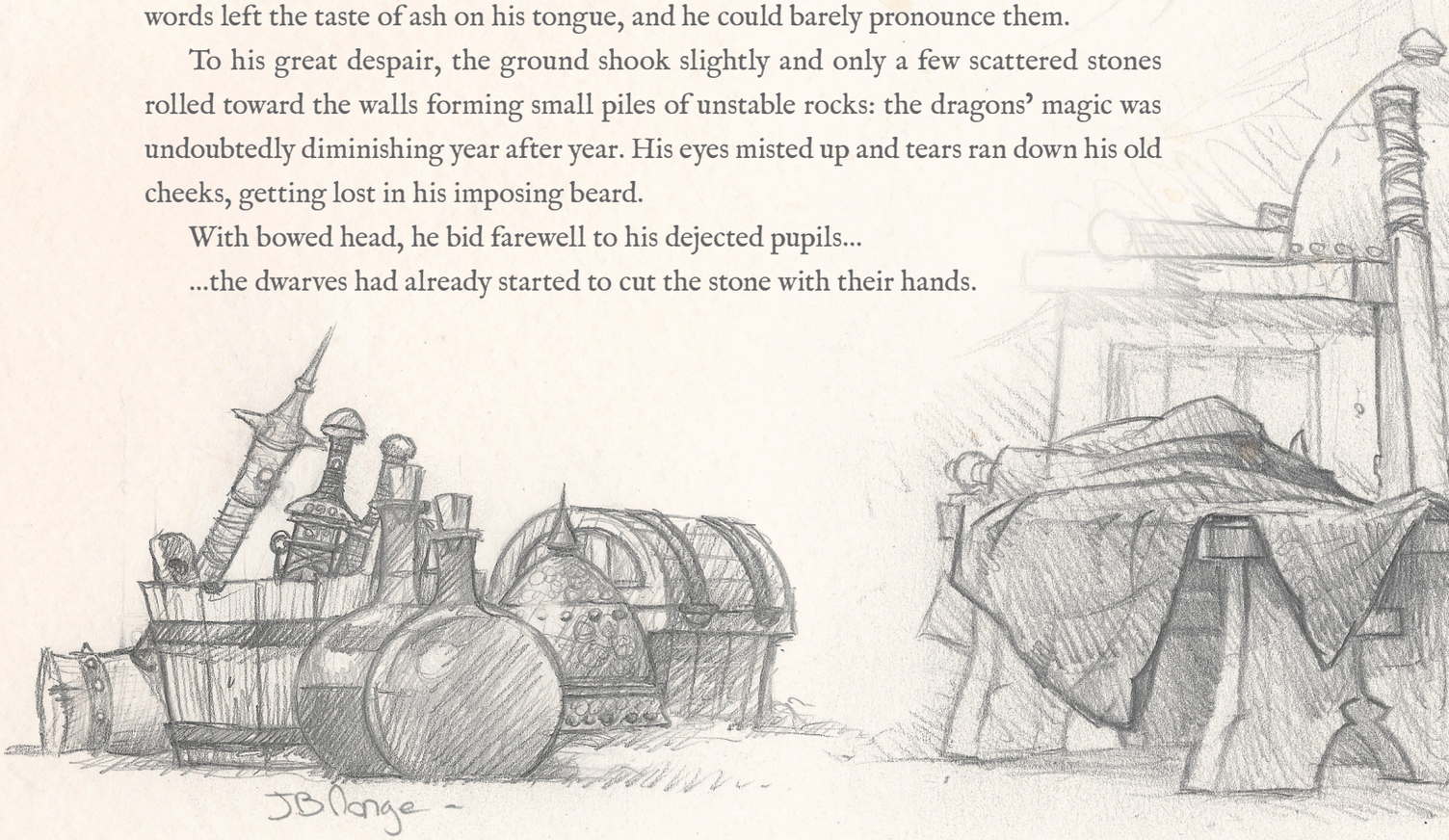
A big and smelly candle of yellow tallow burned slowly, diffusing a faint orange light. Behind this chaotic wall of knowledge, one could hardly identify the top of the head of the one who was leaning on a huge collection, working at this desk. Lost in his thoughts, Thoren Calderillon, a vigorous dwarf approaching 421 years old, scribbled his quill pen. Why does he forget so many things that just happened when he remembers his younger years as if they were yesterday? He could still see the day of his initiation more than three centuries ago.

His Master Mason named Dun Ardail, a powerful mage with a ruddy complexion, long white beard, and bushy eyebrows, gave the first lesson on the magic of the earth. In one of the newly dug galleries, he struck the ground respectfully with the end of his stick while softly reciting the real names of stone and earth in the language of dragons. The ground then began to rumble and tremble, raising a thick cloud of dust, and before the stunned eyes of the apprentice masons, a large part of the rock and dirt remained in suspension, soon sliding and rolling until walls rose slowly to form wonderful columns with expertly chiseled shafts and marquees in what seemed to be the hardest of stones. Such was the mighty magic of the dragons. A great sadness then took hold of Thoren Calderillon upon remembering these ancient days. For almost a century, he had been a great master mason and during his final lesson, he had cast the spell learned from old Dun Ardail. He mastered it perfectly and yet, hitting the ground with his staff now, the words left the taste of ash on his tongue, and he could barely pronounce them.

To his great despair, the ground shook slightly and only a few scattered stones rolled toward the walls forming small piles of unstable rocks: the dragons' magic was undoubtedly diminishing year after year. His eyes misted up and tears ran down his old cheeks, getting lost in his imposing beard.

With bowed head, he bid farewell to his dejected pupils...

...the dwarves had already started to cut the stone with their hands.



THE MASTERS OF STONE

Dwarves & Dragons

DEATH OF A KING

Day 8 after the main attack

Three days ago, we closed the north door for good. If we couldn't use it, at least he couldn't get in that way. That drained the last bit of magic in my old body, and I am now a powerless mage, the last of my order, and a warrior of little value. I had to take the thousand men who survived the battles under my command, all accomplished warriors but exhausted by the events, and probably for the most part too young or too old for war.

Day 10

We somehow managed to reach the south gate and as we approached my heart tightened in my chest. Everything here was carnage.

The bodies of our friends, brothers, wives and excruciatingly mutilated children littered the floor of the cave. The south door had held and had been closed, but at what cost? Hordes of terrified goblins, fleeing before our new enemy, had succeeded in crossing our lines, and in an instant, their madness had overtaken everything in its path.

The door would not hold much longer, and we do not have the means to seal it again. Even worse, in the center of the cave stood a hundred dark-faced warriors, more than a thousand goblins frozen in death lay at their feet. The ground was sticky with blood, the battle must have been terrible, but the circle had remained impregnable.

In the center surrounded by a handful of women and children, a warrior respectfully held the lifeless body of Durin, son of Than, the one who had been king under the mountain for more than three centuries.

PAUL BONNER

Day 11

Hope fades and the last sentence of the prophecy of the mountain oracle, the spirit of one of the most ancient dragons, echoes in my skull: "Dwarves too full of pride, the mountain will be your tomb!"

We had to bury our king with dignity, but time was against us and only the western gate could still make this cursed prophecy a lie. I didn't have time to send a patrol to investigate the way, we had to get out or die there. In any case, the gate would give way soon, so we had no other choice.

The race was fast, but the disappointment was enormous. The bridge that spanned the chasm and led to the door had collapsed. Facing us, less than a hundred cubits away, shone the light of freedom, forever out of reach. In front of the abyss, the goblins had left us a macabre souvenir, a sick joke: a dwarf warrior impaled on a pike stared at us through hollow sockets. Wings had been made from his bones and skin, and on his chest, smeared with dried blood, the rune of our ancient protector and the inscription "King under the Mountain" could be seen.

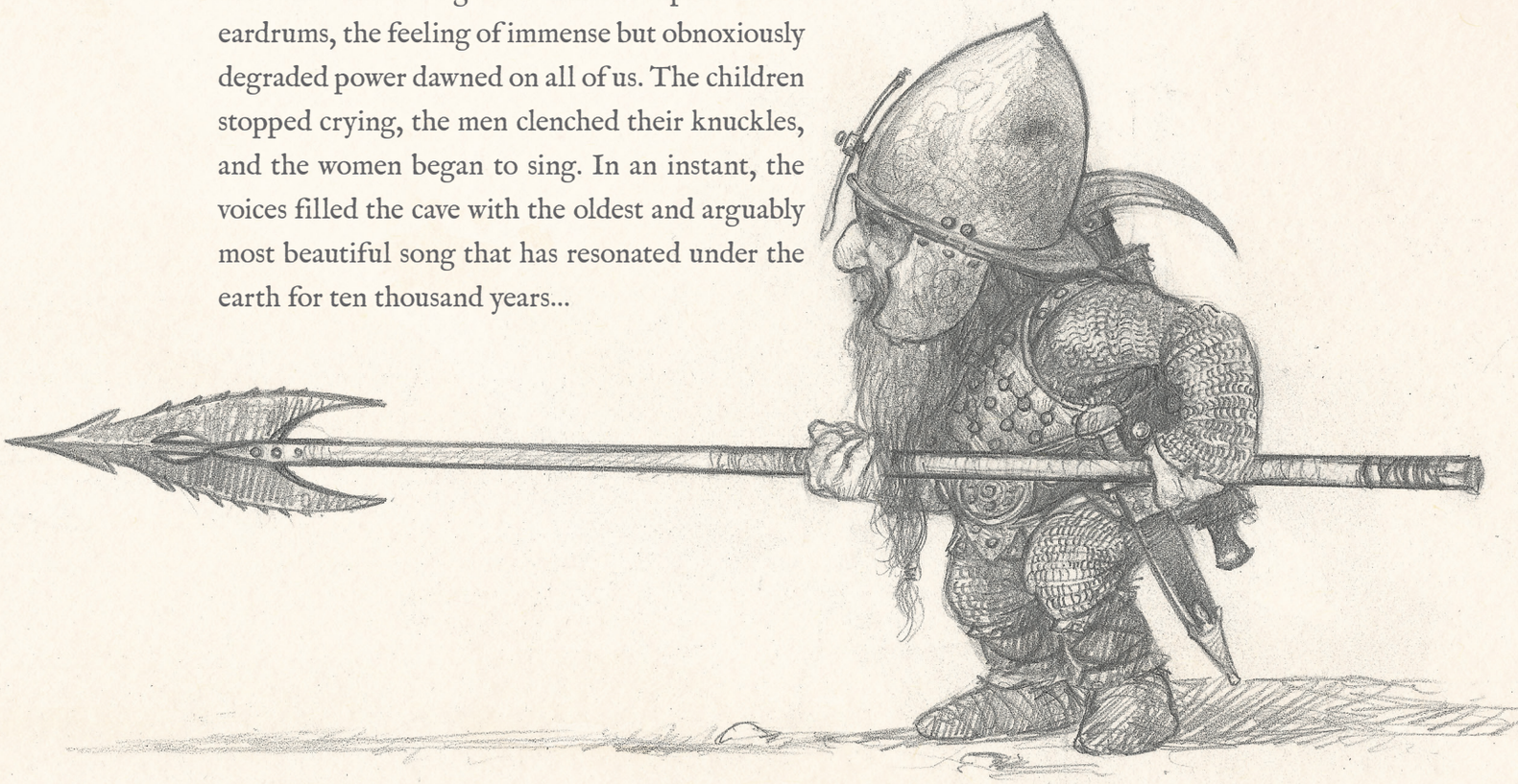
Glen Blackmon

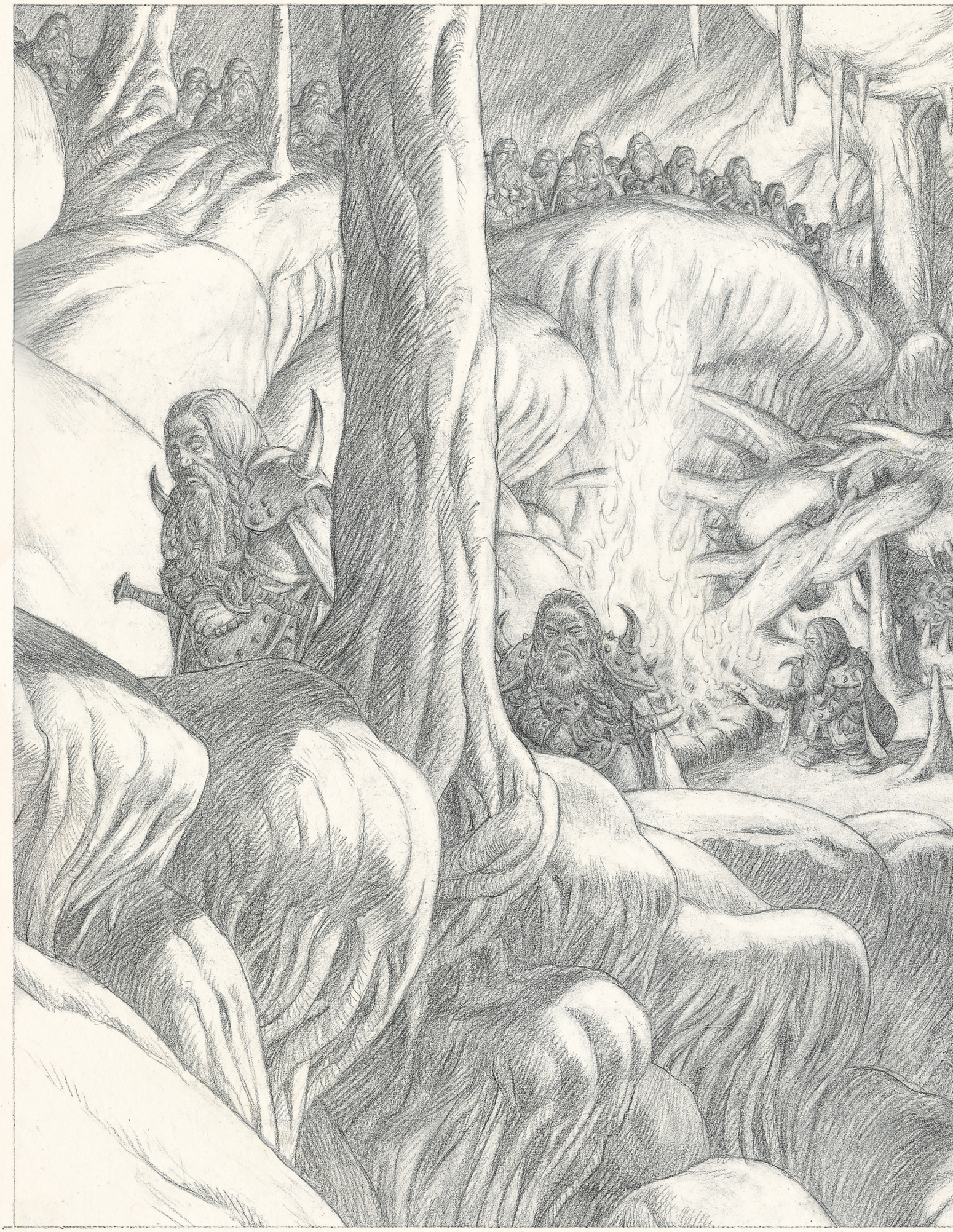
Angus McBride 05

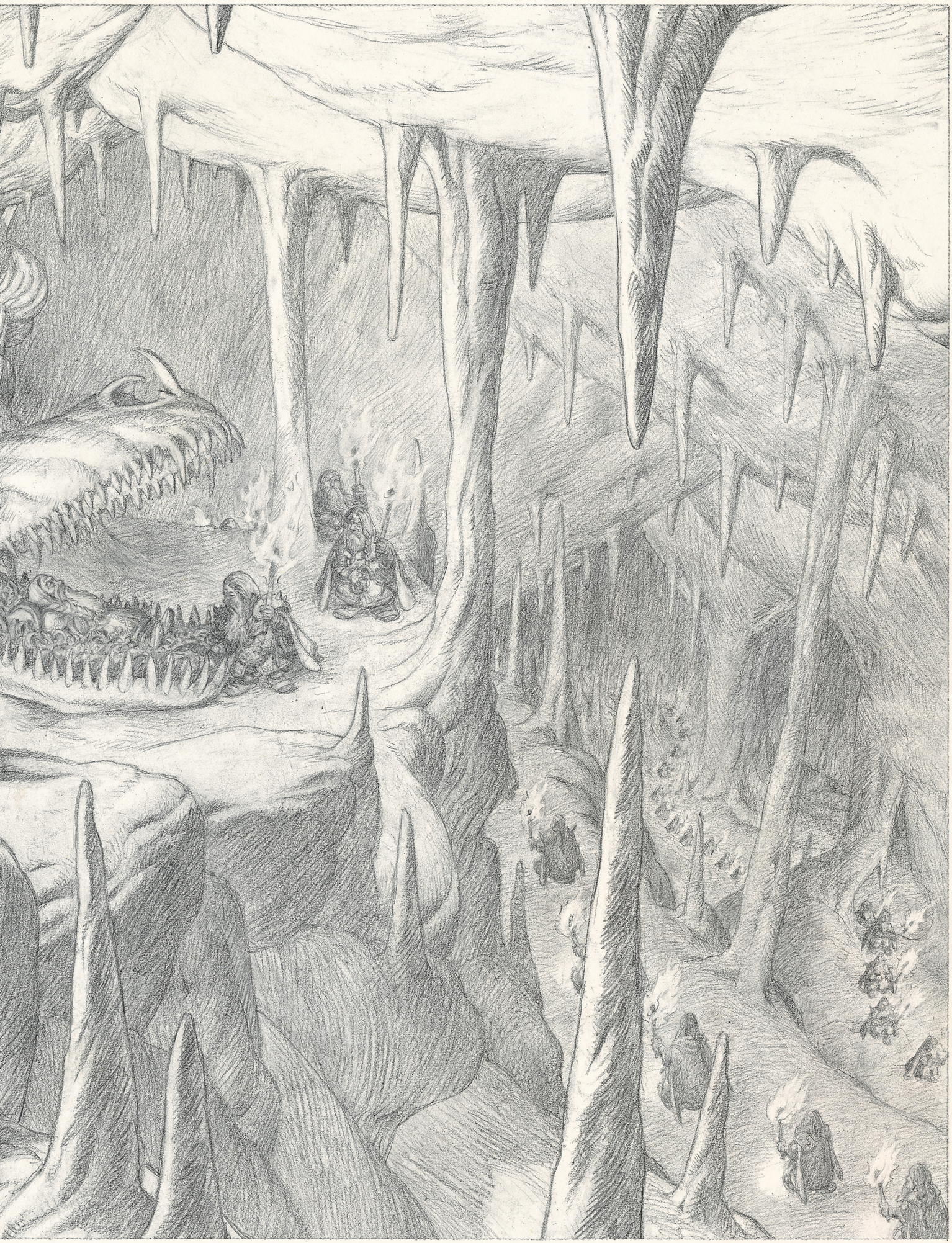
Day 15

All hope was gone for good this time. We went to the oldest cave in Kun an Daran to bury our king. His body would rest with his fathers as tradition dictated. The door to the hall was closed and we offered our souls to the earth gods during the ceremony. Then came the dreaded moment. The ground began to shake beneath our feet.

Unbearable shrieks engulfed the cavern, and at the same time a huge roar almost exploded our eardrums, the feeling of immense but obnoxiously degraded power dawned on all of us. The children stopped crying, the men clenched their knuckles, and the women began to sing. In an instant, the voices filled the cave with the oldest and arguably most beautiful song that has resonated under the earth for ten thousand years...

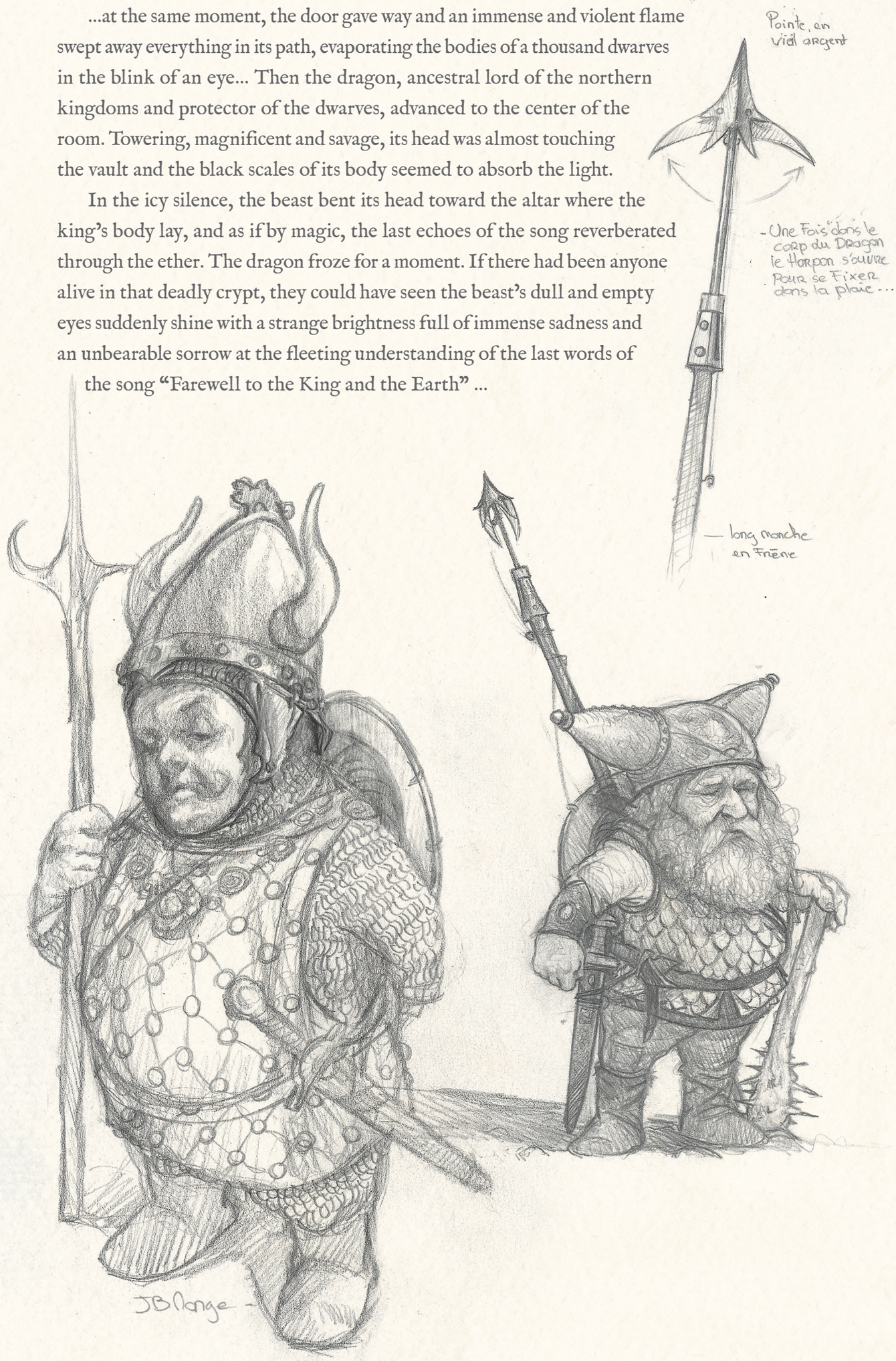






...at the same moment, the door gave way and an immense and violent flame swept away everything in its path, evaporating the bodies of a thousand dwarves in the blink of an eye... Then the dragon, ancestral lord of the northern kingdoms and protector of the dwarves, advanced to the center of the room. Towering, magnificent and savage, its head was almost touching the vault and the black scales of its body seemed to absorb the light.

In the icy silence, the beast bent its head toward the altar where the king's body lay, and as if by magic, the last echoes of the song reverberated through the ether. The dragon froze for a moment. If there had been anyone alive in that deadly crypt, they could have seen the beast's dull and empty eyes suddenly shine with a strange brightness full of immense sadness and an unbearable sorrow at the fleeting understanding of the last words of the song "Farewell to the King and the Earth" ...



DONAT

My name is Sven and I serve under Ragnhild, supreme chief of the Sons of the Wind guild, a brotherhood of dragon hunters that spans the eastern lands. My commander's feline beauty and innate hunting skills have earned her the nickname "The Lioness of Gutland" from her men. If Ragnhild comes across as a tough and lonely woman whose hatred of dragons is unrivaled, I know this is not the case, quite the contrary. She is indeed the last representative of the Great Dragonlords still alive today... She carries a gaping wound, a scar that no friendship, no love can close.

Ragnhild ruled the eastern skies for more than three centuries alongside Svarden, her dragon, and the bond between them seemed unbreakable. They were one being, their minds united in perfect harmony, as it was with all Dragonlords. The magic that bound them gave the rider ancestral power and extraordinary longevity, comparable to that of the elves. The dragon, inevitably, during its immortal existence, changed riders many times. However, when the Dragonlord died, his spirit merged with that of his master. Over time, this undeniably helped make these lords of another age more human and certainly more resistant to the insidious evil that plagued them. This was unfortunately not enough...

When this strange and cursed disease spread over the world of Dorne, Ragnhild was among the last to roam the eastern sky with a great dragon. Svarden struggled with all his being to resist the evil that was gradually burning his soul, but madness inevitably overtook reason, and moments of lucidity became increasingly rare. One day, he banished Ragnhild from his mind and in that instant, she understood the extent of her lord and master's terror. It was with a broken heart and soul that she finally gave in to Svarden's pleas. Infinite love and painful compassion guided her hand. She planted her blade right into the heart of the beast! That day, at the moment when the merciful death took him, he made the Lioness swear to fight until her last breath to rid all the dragons in Dorne of this terrible plague. And I, Sven, feel that day after day, year after year, hunt after hunt, this promise consumes her heart and soul...

Excerpt from "Hours of Blood."
From the memoirs of Chief Sven Alendale

Chief Sven Alendale

THE HEIRS OF THE EARTH

Ragnarok, or the time of dreams

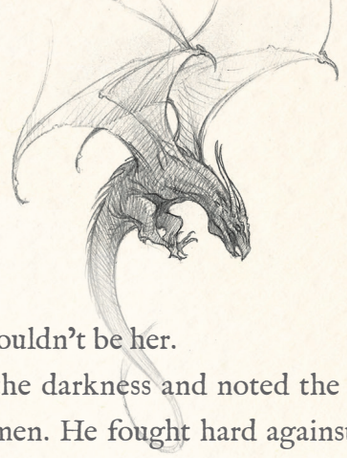
"My life is fading away, my reign is coming to an end, and with it goes the time of dreams... I long to find my sweet Elfride."

Ragnarok shifted on his creaky bed, a shin digging into his sides, which, in his humble opinion, was very unpleasant, even for a dragon whose thick scales could deflect the sharpest spear. A few days ago, he was welcomed with great pomp in the city of his friend King Bungalor and had a lunch of tasty roasted cows in his company. He would have nibbled on a few dozen more but hadn't wanted to push it... Or maybe it was a century ago? He felt full and yet had no memory of going on a hunt. His reason wandered more and more often, and reality sailed in concert with the echoes of the past... The most painful thing was certainly realizing it nonetheless, his ancient wisdom was still an obstacle to this madness that gnawed at his soul like a malignant cancer.

Leading the troop of warriors, Thörn Alguerion advanced in silence. His city had once again been attacked by a great dragon, causing immeasurable loss and considerable damage. This had to come to an end. Baran Bhorou XIII, his king, had ordered him to find the monster's lair, flush it out and make carrion of it. They had walked a long way, but two nights ago his scouts had spotted the monumental entrance to what appeared to be a dragon's lair. As they entered the huge cavern, the smell of sulfur and decay left no doubt in their minds. His dwarves, valiant and stalwart men, had known the unspeakable butchery of the Ophidian Wars, the icy battlefields of Tallaran in distant Boreas, the bloody raids on his city by the suicide legions of Bannenborg. Many had fallen over the centuries, but the sons had taken up their father's weapons and never shamed their memory... He knew that when the time came, they would face the horror. Tightening his grip on Trenchemenu the Faithful, his huge double-ironed axe, he plunged further into the dark abyss...

Ragnarok shifted his position again and thought to himself that his extremely uncomfortable bed was in dire need of a new layer of skulls! He would ask his two sons Halvor and Balder to help him. A few hundred heads of those smelly orcs would do the trick... But had he ever had any offspring? He couldn't remember. He had watched over his sweet Elfride for a long time, of that at least, he was sure, suffering her fits of madness with her. How many times had he suffered her attacks, as violent as they were sudden, avoiding injury to her while he felt the fangs of his companion tearing his sides? He raised his huge neck and spat out a hellfire that lit up the bottom of the cave. In the glow of the flames, he saw the remains of a great dragon's skeleton. His beloved was there, resting in peace, but he hated himself for not remembering that fateful day when he had accompanied her in her deliverance from death...

Seeing the far end of the cave light up in front of them, Thörn Alguerion raised his axe and ordered his men to stop. The beast was in the nest! The troops resumed their march in dead silence. The great dragon, hearing a noise coming from the entrance of its lair, raised its head. His beloved Elfride was finally coming back, but at the same time he thought this, he cursed at the madness that was infecting his perception of reality.



He knew in his heart it couldn't be her.

His sharp eye scanned the darkness and noted the muffled movements of what appeared to be a group of men. He fought hard against the furious urge to destroy what he felt roaring within him. Was this pitiful existence worth fighting for? He knew, with what little clarity he had left, that the men who were coming carried a burden of hatred and resentment far heavier than any weight of weapons they could ever carry. What little wisdom his mind still held told him that he had probably flown too far. His greatest sorrow would surely be that he would no longer be able to ride the winds and fly aimlessly over the green lands of Dorne, free, in perfect communion with the infinite.

Thörn Alguerion cautiously walked toward the incredible mass but stopped dead in his tracks, petrified with horror when he saw that the dragon was following him out of the corner of his eye. Ragnarok watched the dwarf with some amusement, thinking that such a small thing would have a hard time carrying the immense weight of the glory of having slain the last of the great dragons. He felt the madness come back to lick the wounds in the quiet recesses of his mind. The instincts of the beast took over. The animal in him was awakening and still wanted to live. With a ferocious roar, he forced his body up and presented his flank to Thörn's axe. The beast's presence was mystifying, and the dwarf warrior tightened his grip on his weapon but did not move. The ranks had closed, and the great spears pointed at the dragon. The magnificent beast reared up and received a stream of javelins. He did not spit his fire as expected but cocked his head and gazed intently at the lone dwarf who stood bravely before him. The warrior's instinct took over and Thörn threw Trenchemenu, which went into the body of the beast.

A warrior threw another axe at him and Thörn moved toward the monster that was lying down. When he struck again, the beast took the blow but did not react further. The dwarf warrior stopped. In the blaze of the immense pupil, he read no hatred, no fear, just a plea like an expectation... For a long time, he looked into the eye of the beast. The men, uneasy, watched their captain come back to them and grab a spear. Seeing the unspeakable hope that shone in the dancing flames of the golden orb, he braced himself on the long shaft and thrust it into the heart of the great dragon. The beast took its last breath and died... Thörn Alguerion, captain of the king's guard, victorious on more than a hundred battlefields and undoubtedly one of the greatest warriors of the Dwarf civilization, with great respect withdrew his trusty axe from the lifeless body of Ragnarok, the last of the Lords of Dorne, then took three steps back and, head bowed, knelt down. Stunned silent, his men remained unsure for a moment, and in perfect unity followed their leader's example...

The dark rock of the cave was crumbling, opening up to the vastness of the sky. Far above him, Ragnarok could see his beautiful Elfride hovering in the infinite blue, her scales glistening softly in the hot summer sun...

LOCKWOOD
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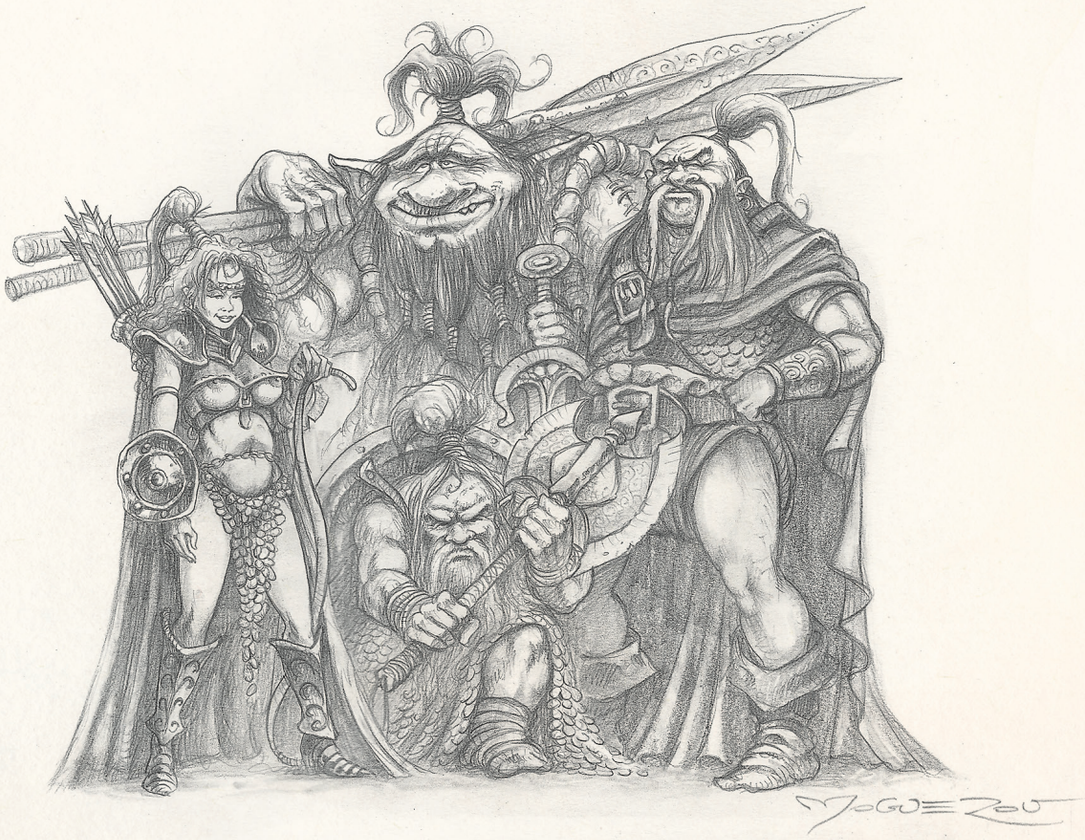
Paul Bonner

The Purple Brotherhood

A thousand pairs of suspicious eyes followed the small troop as they walked up the aisle of the huge hall to the throne of Alderic Aïendal, the seventy-third lord of Milinndyr "The Sumptuous," a prosperous dwarf city renowned for its goldsmiths and the talent of its master jewelers. The city was devoted to trade and had few warriors. Some time ago, however, a monstrous dragon was reported to be heading straight for the Mortepierre Mountains, under which the beautiful dwarf city was built, past the pillars of Bringstorm. The sentinels had given the alert because the scales of the beast, according to them, were beginning to turn blue, a sign that it was a grown female who would soon lay eggs and was looking for a nest to welcome her offspring. The king had given the mission to his personal guard to go in search of dragon hunters...

Moldoinn, the captain of the guard who led the troop, knelt before his king and, using his huge double-edged axe to raise himself up, turned to his companions to introduce them to the patrol. The small disparate group included a giant Mingshu from the tribes of the Arrée Mountains, Dronk. Next to him, looking almost frail, stood Gundalf, an old warrior from the Borean Lands, powerfully built and covered with dozens of scars, testimony of a mercenary life spent selling his sword to the highest bidder. Between her two companions finally came tiny Mirlisse, a charming girl who had made her weapons in the arenas of Balinntesh and who, tired of these victories that seemed without glory, had left for other skies. Her attractive curves lit fires in the eyes of some dwarfs, but they were quickly extinguished when they met her dark gaze... "Beautiful troop of hunters we have there, don't we!" launched King Alderic with great enthusiasm...

A thunder of applause greeted his words and echoed for a long time under the vaults of the royal hall...



DONATO 06

Dragon Heart

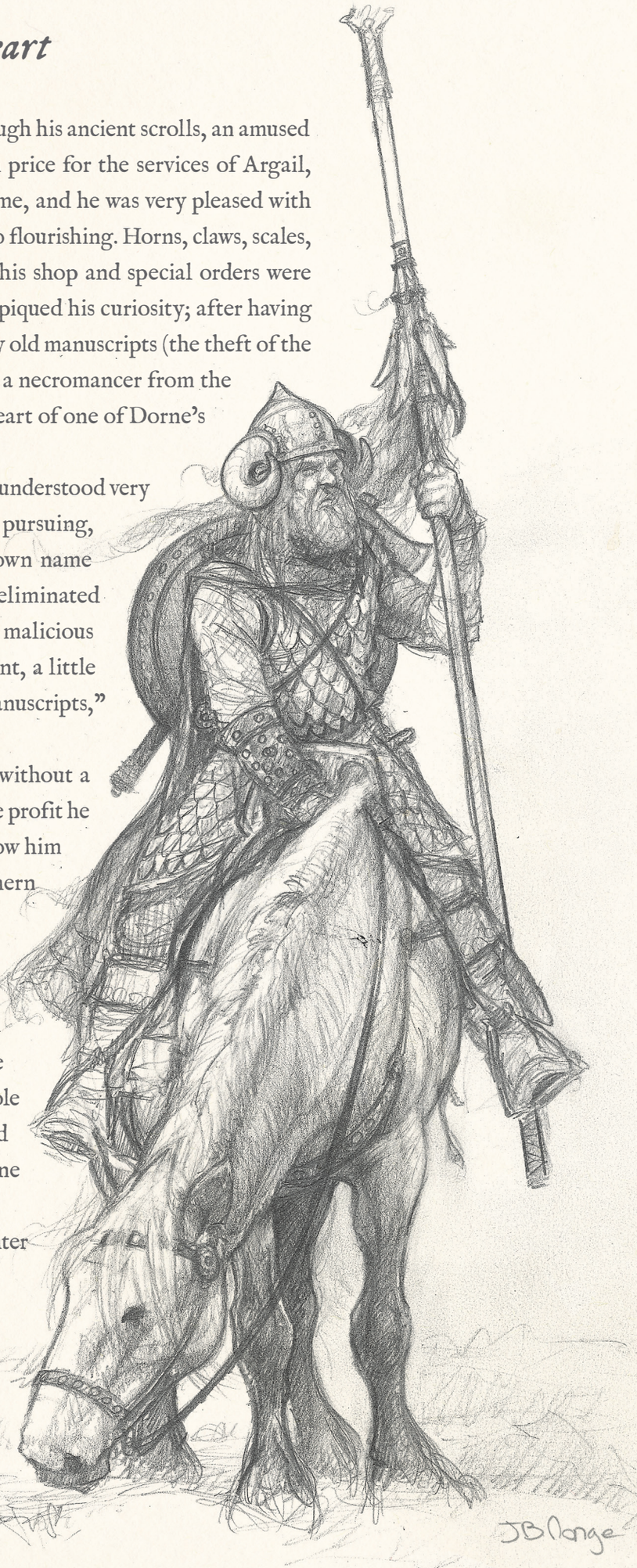
Ourouk el Nasrim casually browsed through his ancient scrolls, an amused smile tugging at his lips. He offered a high price for the services of Argail, one of the greatest dragon hunters of his time, and he was very pleased with himself because his business had never been so flourishing. Horns, claws, scales, bones, and teeth were already piling up in his shop and special orders were coming in from all over. The latest one had piqued his curiosity; after having paid him a considerable sum for copies of very old manuscripts (the theft of the originals alone had been a real feat), Lirnn, a necromancer from the western lands, had placed an order for the heart of one of Dorne's greatest dragons.

Ourouk el Nasrim was not stupid, he had understood very quickly what goal this dangerous woman was pursuing, and he knew that once she reached it, his own name would be high on the list of people to be eliminated as soon as possible. He had therefore, with malicious pleasure, omitted to pass on a crucial element, a little secret only revealed in his own "forbidden manuscripts," those he kept safe for his personal research.

This deal made him very happy, it was without a doubt one of his best tricks and the incredible profit he would make from this transaction would allow him to extend his dominion far beyond the southern lands.

Lirnn would pay dearly for her monstrous ambition. Oh yes, she would acquire the almost divine power of dragons. Oh yes, she would be immortal, but with this immense power would also come an alienation so terrible that her mind would be swept away. She would soon be barely smarter than a goose, for no one can stand the madness of dragons...

...the echoes of Ourouk el Narism's laughter echoed for a long time in his shop.



PAUL BONNER

Argaïl 's Revenge

During the attack on his village, he only had time to shoot a few arrows at the monstrous beast, but they had struck, and he knew it was wounded. He had followed the tracks and left the quiet plains of his homeland far behind...for days he had walked, scanning the sky for the winged figure that was leading him to the northern mountains.

He had walked under the majestic oaks of the dark forests of Valach', infested by bloodthirsty pictes, but the corpses of those who had crossed his path were no more than a fuzzy memory in his mind... He walked, allowing himself only very rare hours of rest, content with the meager food he brought with him. The further north he went, the colder the air got, but when night came, he avoided lighting a fire that would have betrayed his presence. The trail became easier, as the beast came to the ground more and more often, a sign that the arrows were doing their work and weakening the monster.

He arrived at the foot of the Dantesque foothills of the howling mountains. The snowy peaks that were lost in the clouds blocked his horizon. Tightening his grip on his spear, he began to hunt again. The next day he discovered the remains of a bear's corpse, the beast had regained its strength before reaching its nest. He could still smell its foul stench floating in the cold air. His hunting instincts told him it was close... The hunt would soon be over. Looking up at the peaks, he felt a storm coming in the air... For a brief moment, his thoughts drifted back to his destroyed village, to his home: his sweet and tender Sighilde, Olrik and Gunnar, his two beloved sons. Soon, very soon he would be able to rest...

...And mourn them.

Centuries later, troubadours still sing of the exploits of the valiant Argail who faced the beast in a titanic battle.

CIVIELLO, 07

In the unexplored mountains of the far north,
it is said that there are dragons of dazzling beauty.

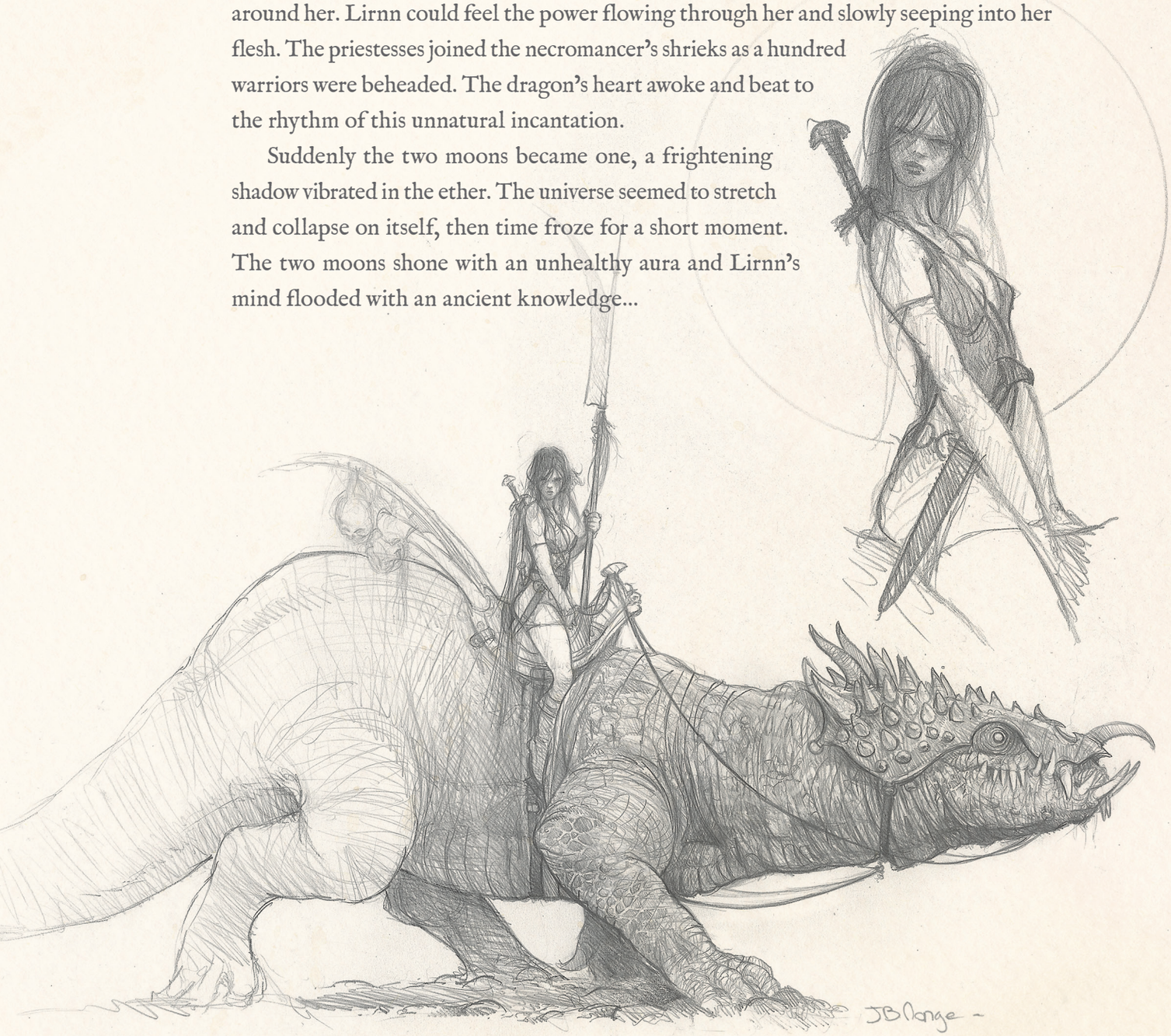
LOCKWOOD

Lirnn the Necromancer

Dorne's moons were still high in the sky when Lirnn sang her funeral song. Everything had been meticulously prepared by her priestesses for years. Before her on a monstrous stone altar lay the lifeless bodies of six young virgins abducted from Dorne's noblest families. The task had not been easy, and cunning had played as much a part as magic. Ourouk el Nasrim had been a great help, his forbidden manuscripts had opened the doors to a magic as old as the world itself. But, if he too had seemed to bend over backwards before her, Lirnn knew that it was better to be wary of this strange little goblin who reigned as absolute master over the souks of the southern lands.

The blood of the victims now flowed into a basin in the center of the altar and washed over the heart of one of the most powerful dragons in the west. As the chanting grew louder and louder, the blood began to boil, and black and gold wisps of it wrapped around her. Lirnn could feel the power flowing through her and slowly seeping into her flesh. The priestesses joined the necromancer's shrieks as a hundred warriors were beheaded. The dragon's heart awoke and beat to the rhythm of this unnatural incantation.

Suddenly the two moons became one, a frightening shadow vibrated in the ether. The universe seemed to stretch and collapse on itself, then time froze for a short moment. The two moons shone with an unhealthy aura and Lirnn's mind flooded with an ancient knowledge...



The indigestible gesture of Knight GAUDIBERT OF ENTREFION, Lord of Tourtemol

Songs and laments of the grieving widow

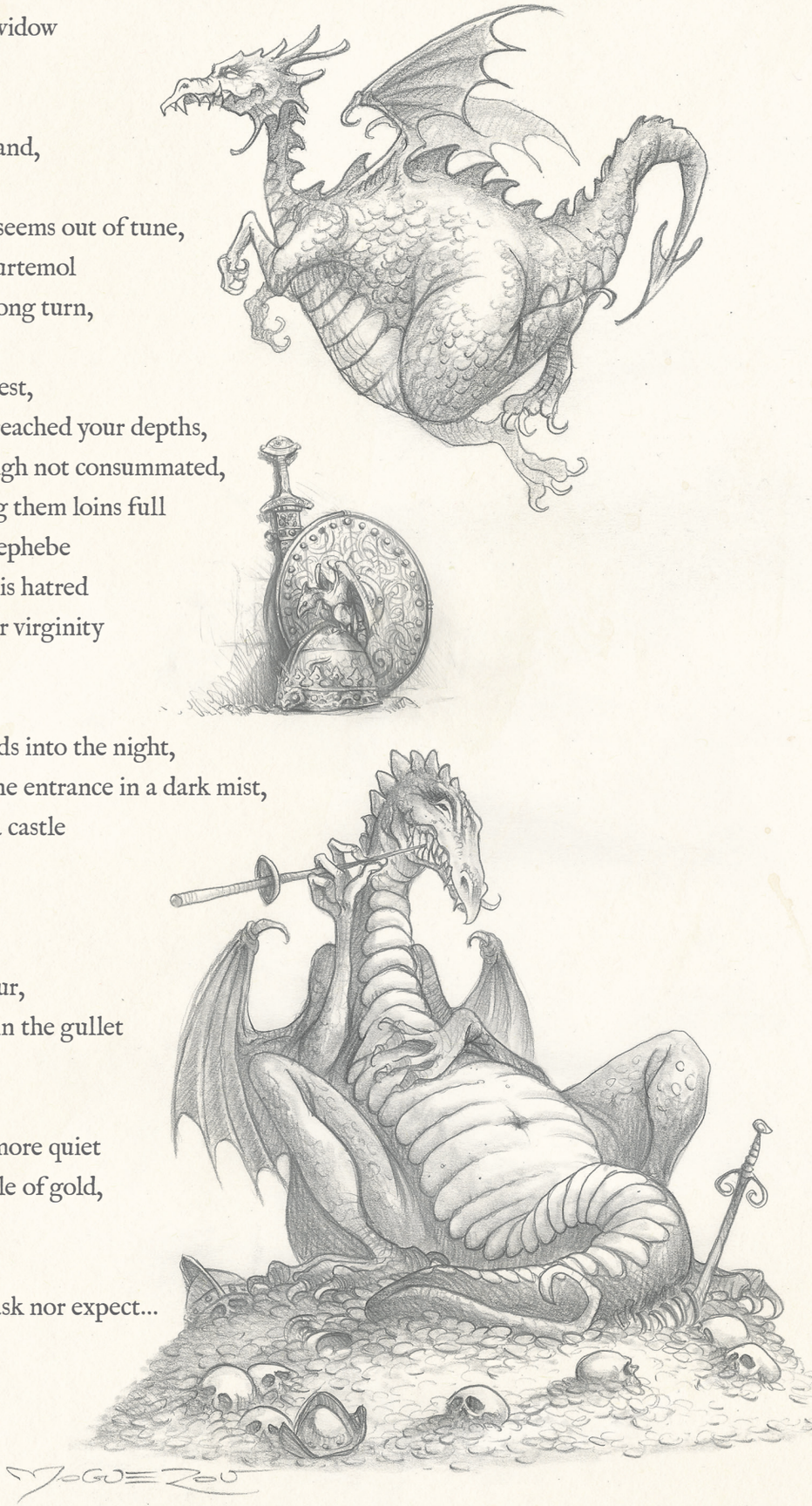
Good people, learn of misfortune
Hear the plight that befell by my hand,
O pretty damsel, O gentle squire,
To the poor knight, whose destiny seems out of tune,
Gaudibert of Entrefion, lord of Tourtemol
Who left for glory and took the wrong turn,

Please, stop screaming darling dearest,
For the dragon's fangs haven't yet reached your depths,
Our nuptials were announced, though not consummated,
And the proud knight always having them loins full
Went on to discharge them like an ephebe
I spoke of his tail juice and not of his hatred
From the dragon thief who stole her virginity

His spear very stiff and upright
From the dragon's lair smoke spreads into the night,
His helmet on his ears, he crosses the entrance in a dark mist,
The darkness falls like pitch from a castle
And without any trouble
Ends in the belly of the beast...

If cows and sheep are good to devour,
A plump knight quickly gets stuck in the gullet
Hard to chew is the tin armor,
Sad fate to choke on rotten meat
These are dark times where one is more quiet
To take a well-earned nap on his pile of gold,

No consideration and no respect
For a poor dragon had nothing to ask nor expect...



Angus McBride '05

The Dragon Song

Fearless knight chasing glory,
What foolish oath did you make then
In starting your quest?

Under what distant skies,
Towards what uncertain shores
Did you let her lead you?
Was it hate or love
That dictated this path?
Was it vengeance or mercy
That trained your arm?

Were you then aware
Of what you were hunting?

They were not beasts
Such as the bear or the lion,
They were the gods of a world
Now gone,
Last representatives of an inhuman knowledge
Whose spirits were by an unknown evil
Imprisoned in eternal torment.

Sometimes death is sweet for one who waits for it.

Fearless knight, see how
Glory is vain, death was dragging
In your wake and unfortunately
This time she's set her sights on you.

I, who awaited her for so long...

"Songs and Gestures of the Old World"
Gundar III

For twenty moons, Elena had tirelessly searched for the egg of the black dragon, the most powerful creature in the High Mountains. At sixteen years old, most often dressed in a simple tunic and helmet, she belonged to the Mylean people composed exclusively of women renowned for their discipline, courage, and warrior qualities.

A banner as red as the blood of their enemies floated over the city. The Myleans considered themselves sisters united around their Queen, the Matriarch. The Masters of Arms constantly tested their fencing skills and their resistance to pain. The training sessions were long and exhausting, with swords clashing for hours on end. Only the strongest survived such trials, as the City did not keep the weak.

The Myleans had a fierce hatred of men. Brought back from distant raids, they did all the housework and were never allowed to speak. The less fortunate were sacrificed, the more fortunate were used as breeding stock. Elena had thus not known her father, a simple slave destined for reproduction, chosen for his beauty and strength.

Elena looked like her mother, the Matriarch. In a huge hall, standing still amidst marble statues of Pelya the Goddess of War, she managed all the affairs of the City and presided over the Council of Elders.

ELENA'S
QUEST

Erlé

Karl Kopinski

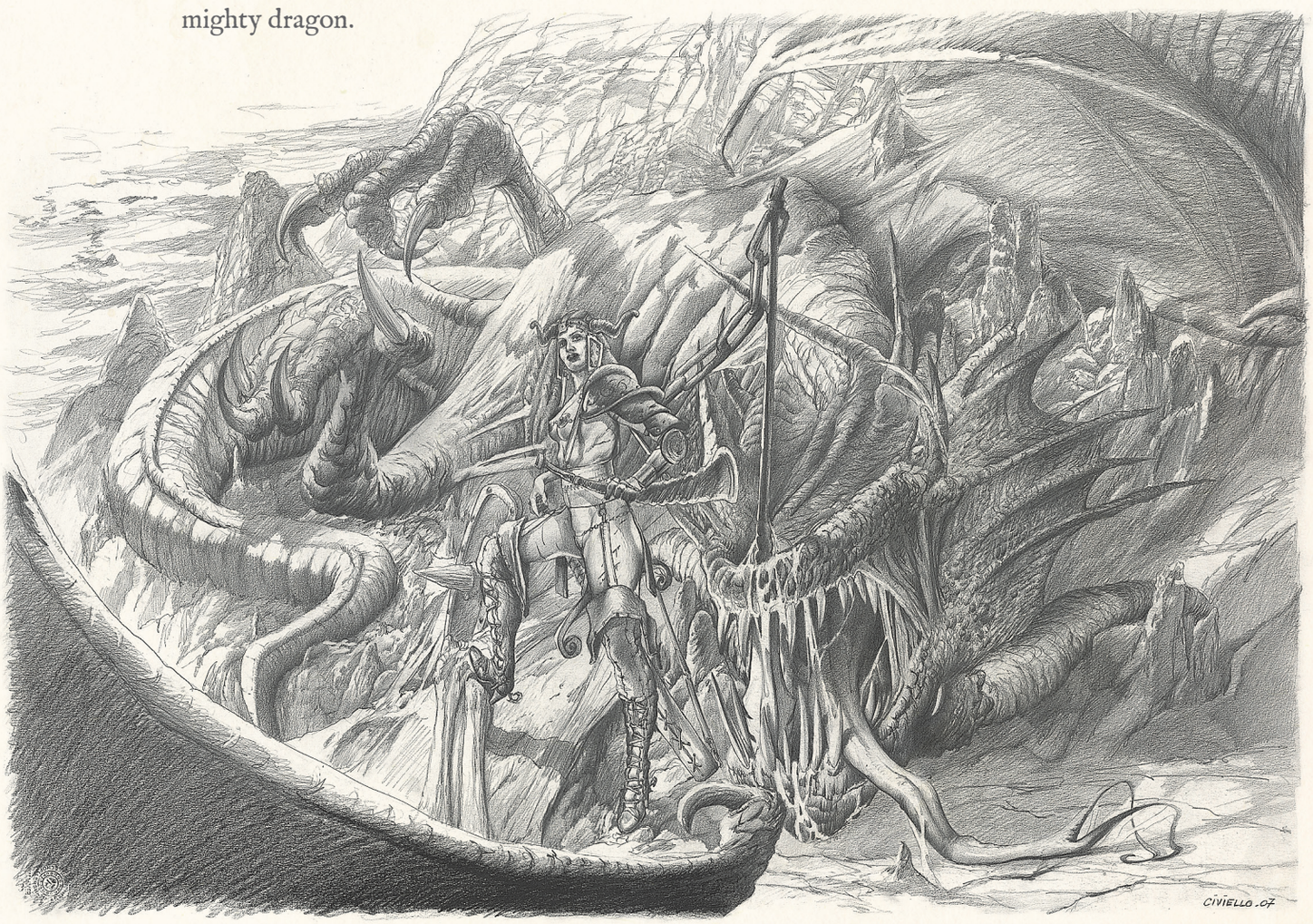
Her black hair was combed into a multitude of braids, symbols of her power and victories. From her golden throne, she coldly gazed ahead, her hand on her sword. Behind her stood ten female warriors who made up the Matriarchal Guard. All would have given their lives for her without a moment's hesitation.

Hundreds of Mylean women kneeled on the ground, impassive and silent. The warriors were enlisted during a ceremony in honor of the Matriarch. At the end of the ceremony, each warrior received a sword, a ten-foot spear, and a finely chiseled and decorated helmet. The warriors took an oath to defend the honor of the City until their death.

The Matriarch had never paid the slightest attention to Elena, except on the day of the Council of Elders, when she tied her first braid, a symbol of her becoming a warrior. On a moonless night, she had chopped off the heads of two orcs wandering around the City with a single blow of her sword. Her mother stared at her for a brief moment, her eyes filled with pride.

The Myleans admired Ewen, their most famed ancestor. More powerful and fierce than a horde of orcs, she captured dragons and rode them bareback. Ewen and a dwarf named Oryn constantly hunted down orcs to kill. Legend has it that she saw a majestic black dragon above the High Mountains.

The warriors placed their lives in the hands of the Goddesses and had to draw their destiny from their dreams. On the eve of her thirteenth birthday, wrapped in her blankets, Elena imagined herself brandishing her sword and striking a mighty dragon.



CIVIELLO-07

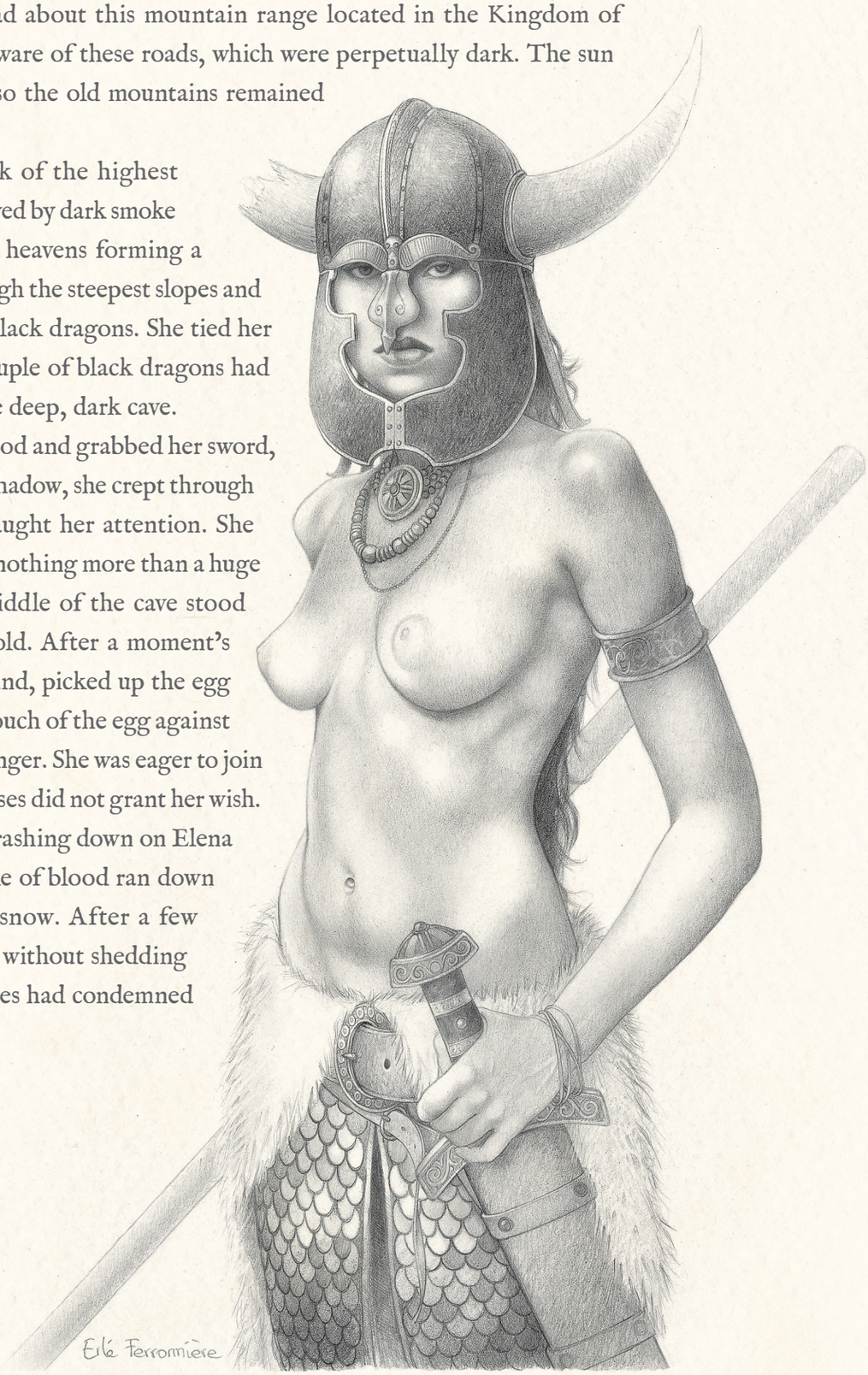
The following night, she dreamed she was riding a black dragon to the ends of the world. Her status as a warrior required her to accomplish a great feat. She knew she must leave home to fulfill her destiny: to find a black dragon's egg. At dusk, she left the City at full gallop to reach the High Mountains. She would not rest until she found the precious egg. She rode through the black forests of Pelian, the arid deserts of Ezgor, the shores of the bottomless lakes of Aspaar, the villages of Ozni and the crowded towns of Helmeg.

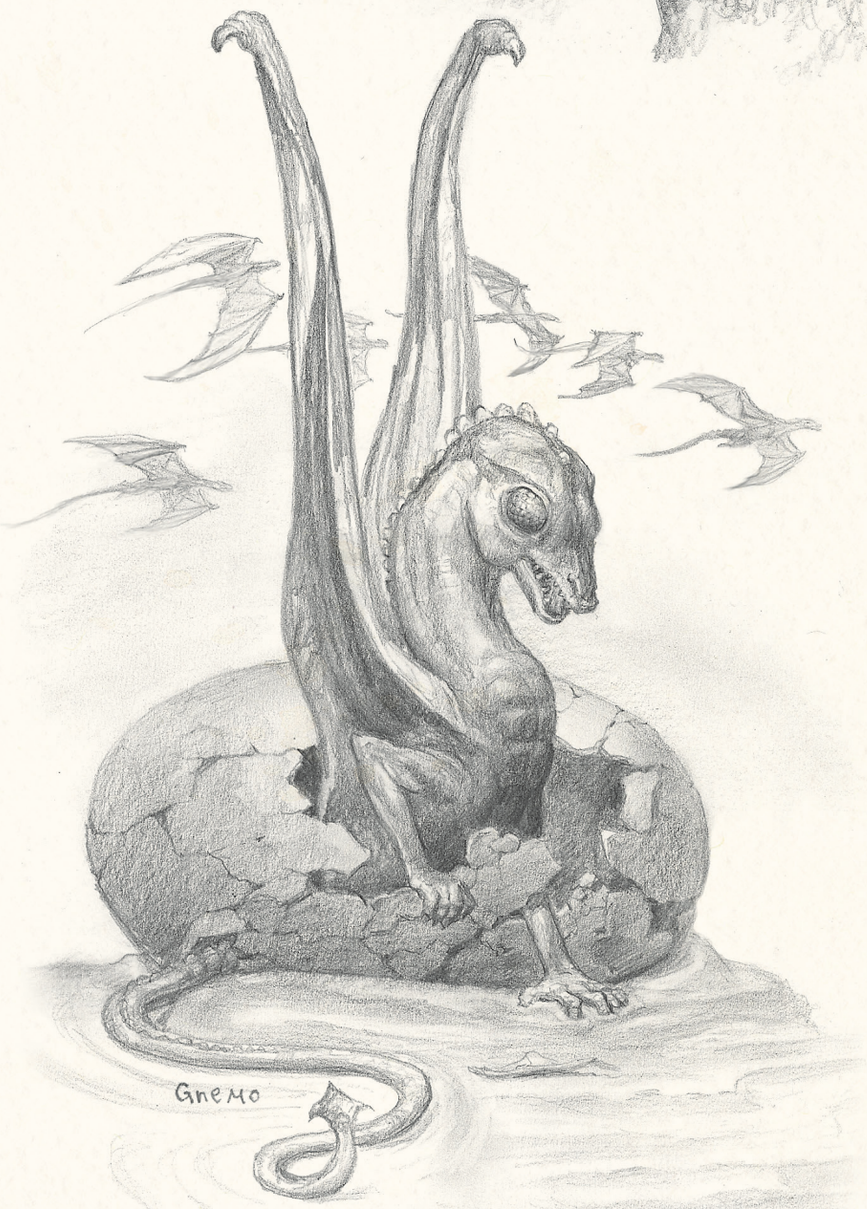
Elena had become accustomed to the harsh weather conditions of the High Mountains. Frightening legends spread about this mountain range located in the Kingdom of Velairs. Few people were aware of these roads, which were perpetually dark. The sun never rose in this region, so the old mountains remained permanently frozen.

From the highest peak of the highest mountain rose a roar, followed by dark smoke that seemed to rise to the heavens forming a thick fog. Elena rode through the steepest slopes and discovered the lair of the black dragons. She tied her horse to a rock. After a couple of black dragons had scattered, she rode into the deep, dark cave.

She pushed back her hood and grabbed her sword, her senses alert. Silent as a shadow, she crept through the icy tunnels. A light caught her attention. She entered a room, which was nothing more than a huge block of quartz. In the middle of the cave stood a dragon's egg glowing gold. After a moment's hesitation, she looked around, picked up the egg and stomped off. Just the touch of the egg against her body made her feel stronger. She was eager to join her people, but the Goddesses did not grant her wish.

A black dragon came crashing down on Elena with all its weight. A trickle of blood ran down her face and stained the snow. After a few spasms, she died in silence without shedding a single tear. The Goddesses had condemned her to oblivion.





She did not witness the most beautiful sight: the hatching of the egg. It cracked open, revealing a baby dragon with scales whiter than snow and wings longer than its body.

The offering

Join me in the dawn mists
And eternity will never be your shroud
I'll open the doors of thousands of universes to you
Contemplate at last the full extent of what
The gods have denied mortals.

Come beautiful child, forever, feed your soul
With my immortal flesh.

The journey of Alambria

From her slow crawl she approaches,
Her shadow spreads little by little on the earth,
She comes from the heart of the world
Where Dorne's infernal fires burn,
Her jaw exudes and holds all the madness,
The hatred and pain of a dying world,
Her burning breath shrivels flesh
Before setting souls ablaze.
The stench of her body is such
That a thousand corpses could not imitate it.
Her smooth and shiny body spews a bile
That melts stone
And her unbearable gaze bears a madness.
It is the foul beast,
The one that we no longer name
Since she was stripped of her true name,
Her spirit is cursed until the end of time,
And until the end of time
She will come to feed on your sons
And your daughters.

She is coming...
...Cry, scream your unholy pain,
Abandon all hope, hide in the light,
Curse her once more,
But you've already done the worst,
You have given her a life...

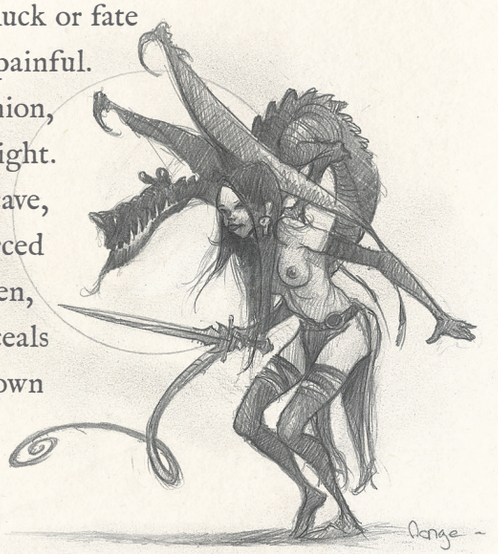
The visions of Astiria

In the Kamalan desert, there had been no rain since Mara was abandoned. Her mother had died in childbirth, and no one knew who her father was. Lamahetan, the clan shaman, had cast the runes that evening and they revealed sinister omens. The council decided that the child had to be removed or else the desert gods would take offense, and death and disease would fall on the village. Yet Lamahetan opposed the decision and stood up to the whole council. The runes were bad, but if madness had taken over the world, it was not about the child, and according to her, the child should not be abandoned, or she would pay the price one day. The shaman watched over the child until she was six years old.

Unfortunately, old age and the illness eating at her bones took the senior woman away one evening. In the morning, the village chief saw this as a sinister omen and took the child to the mountains.

Mara, the dark girl of rain

Mara should have died by the sun or the wild beasts, but luck or fate once again came to her aid. The first few nights were terribly painful. Mara hunkered down in a cave with terror as her only companion, jumping at every wild beast's roar that tore through the night. Luckily, water dripped from the rock at the bottom of the cave, allowing her to quench her thirst, but it was hunger that forced her to leave her refuge. The desert does not coddle its children, but for those who know how to look where they need to, it conceals many treasures and comes alive at sunset. Lamahetan had shown it to Mara and despite her young age, the child had not lost a beat. She had just gotten used to her new environment when she had a strange encounter...



A small sluargh with an injured wing and deadly hunger had taken shelter in her den. Mara's first intention was to kill it for food, but she thought better of it; the animal was so small, so cute, and seemed quite harmless. Besides, she felt terribly lonely, and come to think of it, the sluarghs were intelligent and excellent hunters as well.

Once again, fate turned the wheel in Mara's favor. The little sluargh recovered quickly and a real bond and strong attachment was born between these two very different beings. Time passed filled with dangers, games, and hunting. The sluargh had grown enormously and Mara felt that she might soon be able to fly on its back.

She knew he would let himself be ridden the day she wrapped her thin, muscular thighs around his strong neck. The world would then be theirs. They would rule heaven and earth, she with her cunning and innate intelligence as a wild woman, and he with his power and hunting skills. In all the desert villages, they soon spoke only of the woman with the sluargh who called herself in a guttural language, "Mara, the dark girl of rain." She had first started by finding her village and then landed at nightfall in the middle of the filthy shacks. The sky had become strangely overcast above her, and the rain, as if to celebrate her return, began to fall. The villagers, at first frightened, then incredulous, and ultimately amazed by this double miracle falling from the sky, finally approached. They sent for the chief, but his hut was empty and only Mara was not surprised. The day before, her sluargh had taken only one bite...

Since then, Mara reigns alone over the desert, protected by her most faithful friend and all her descendants. In all the villages she is revered as a goddess, she takes what she wants but never more than she needs. And no more children have been offered to the desert.

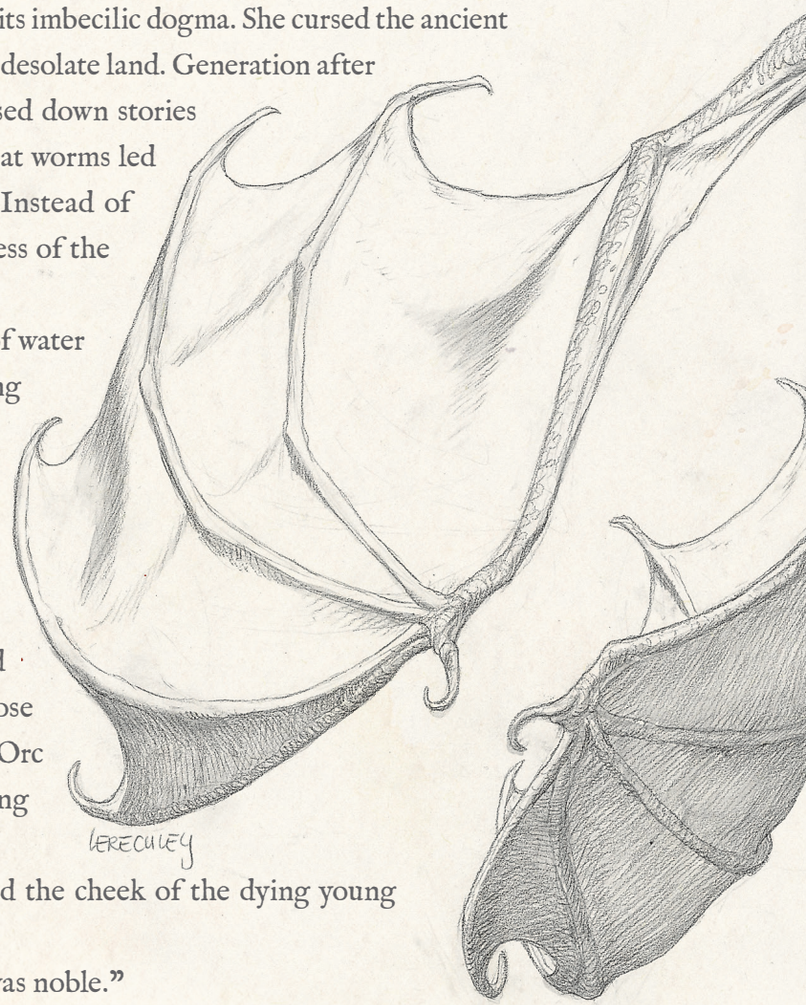
Excerpt from "CHRONICLES OF THE OLD WORLD"
by Ourouk el Nasrim

The lightning that streaked the sky illuminated the night with a spectral glow. The rumble of thunder rolled down the deep valleys. The thunderstorm that had been threatening for days was now raging over the mountains, unleashing waves from the sky.

Tonight, Hayoc's child was stillborn. The prayers were useless, the science and remedies of Noon Gurnak the shaman were useless, and it was feared that the mother, drunk with fatigue and plagued by malignant fevers, would not last the night either. These were cursed times, this land where only the strong could hope to survive would not welcome children. "One more heart for Baal!" the sorcerer chiefs would say, one more soul to serve him, who would go to inflate the ranks of his infernal cohorts. Noon Gurnak gazed at the filthy blanket that covered the infant's lifeless body lying next to his mother. Praying to the god of death to spare a life seemed absurd. But she was careful not to tell anyone about her dark thoughts, she was a shaman, and as such had to be the guarantor of this bloodthirsty cult and its imbecilic dogma. She cursed the ancient gods for letting them wander aimlessly in this desolate land. Generation after generation, the women of her caste had passed down stories of ancient times when the wisdom of the great worms led the world. What was left of this teaching? Instead of reason, men preferred the memory of madness of the last great dragons...

Noon Gurnak dipped a cloth in a bowl of water and brought it to the young mother's burning forehead.

The caverns echoed with the exalted cries of warriors who would go to war tomorrow somewhere in new fields of death...eternal glory for the arrogance of males and mournful eulogies for every shroud. Her old body shivered under the bite of the cold. Or was it rather those prophetic visions of the long processions of Orc women: mothers, wives and daughters, going forever on roads without a future?



Her hand, in infinite gentleness, caressed the cheek of the dying young mother.

"Brave little warrior, your fight at least was noble."

"...we are cursed, we have forgotten the lessons of our fathers. We are only angry children now..."

...Children of chaos.

CHILDREN OF CHAOS

Orcs & Dragons

TURINOS

Excerpt from the diary of
Captain Fenring, punitive
expedition against
Kutchuk raiders

The Hunt

...“It’s been twelve days since we mounted our Wind Riders in pursuit of a troop of mountain orcs, these damned vermin are getting bolder and bolder, raiding our villages, leaving only death and desolation after each attack.

Our lord has ordered us to hunt them down and bring them back in irons so that they may serve as an example to those who would imitate them. But we have been patrolling between the mountains without the slightest trace. It’s as if they’ve been swallowed up underground!

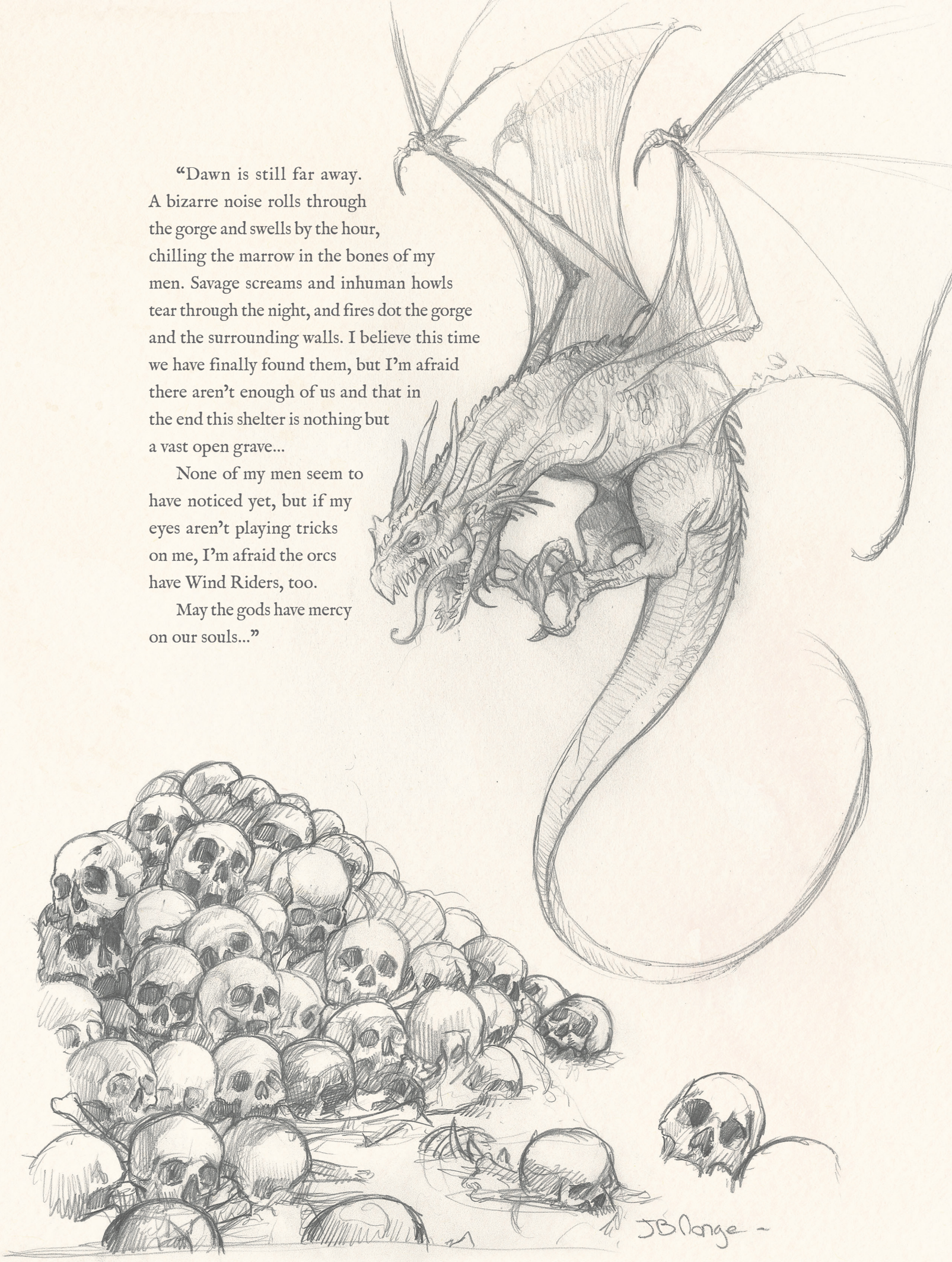
I feel like these dogs are anticipating our every move.”

"It's been several days since we crossed the Windward Pass, and our dragons are getting more and more nervous. My men are having a hard time holding them and staying in the saddle, especially since we're all sorely lacking in sleep... They seem to sense danger, but aside from a couple of hunters and a few venomous Viggos, there's nothing here but rock and these maddening walls that never end. This pass stretches for hundreds of leagues, and by tonight we'll have to find a safe place to shelter... I don't like the look of it, but men and beasts need to rest. This hunt puts our nerves to the test and the desert heat overwhelms us.

We finally found a safe place to set up camp: a rocky ledge rises in the middle of the gorge that can only be accessed by air. The plateau is large enough for the whole troop and the position seems to be the best this incredible maze can offer."

VERECUCEY
2006

LOCKWOOD
2005

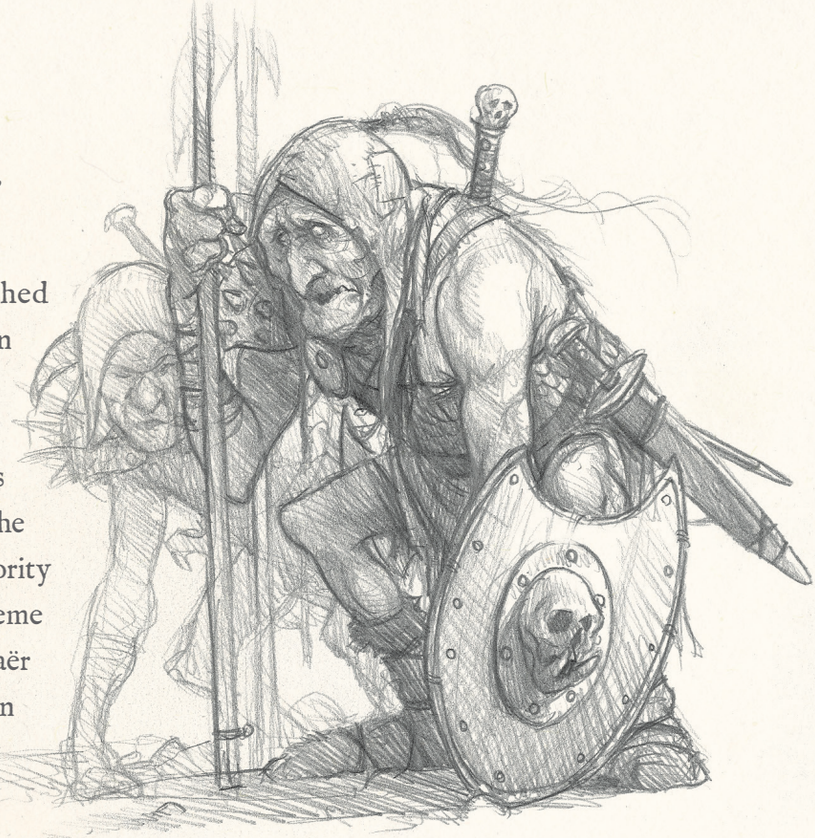


"Dawn is still far away. A bizarre noise rolls through the gorge and swells by the hour, chilling the marrow in the bones of my men. Savage screams and inhuman howls tear through the night, and fires dot the gorge and the surrounding walls. I believe this time we have finally found them, but I'm afraid there aren't enough of us and that in the end this shelter is nothing but a vast open grave...

None of my men seem to have noticed yet, but if my eyes aren't playing tricks on me, I'm afraid the orcs have Wind Riders, too.

May the gods have mercy on our souls..."

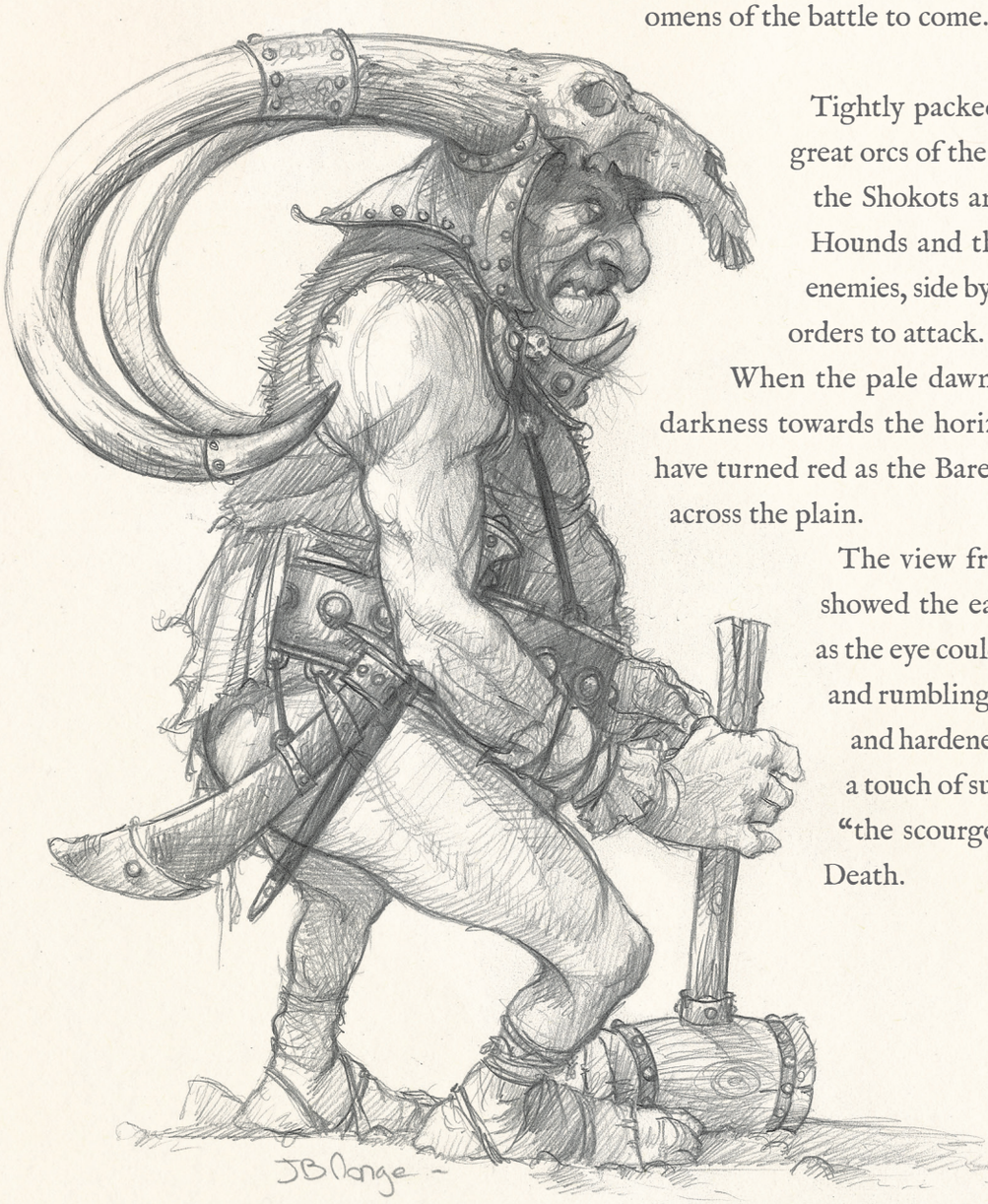
The Sapphire City



Under the pale moons with polished silver disks, the orc troop, frightening in its immensity, stretched endlessly across the plain...

Weeks before, the orc shamans achieved the unthinkable feat of uniting the clans, longtime enemies, under the authority of one and the same warrior, the supreme chief of the Morgues, the bloodthirsty Kaër Khan, in order to bring war and desolation to the fertile lands of the Samarang kingdom...

The red banners stained with the blood of the dead flapped in the wind, gloomy omens of the battle to come...



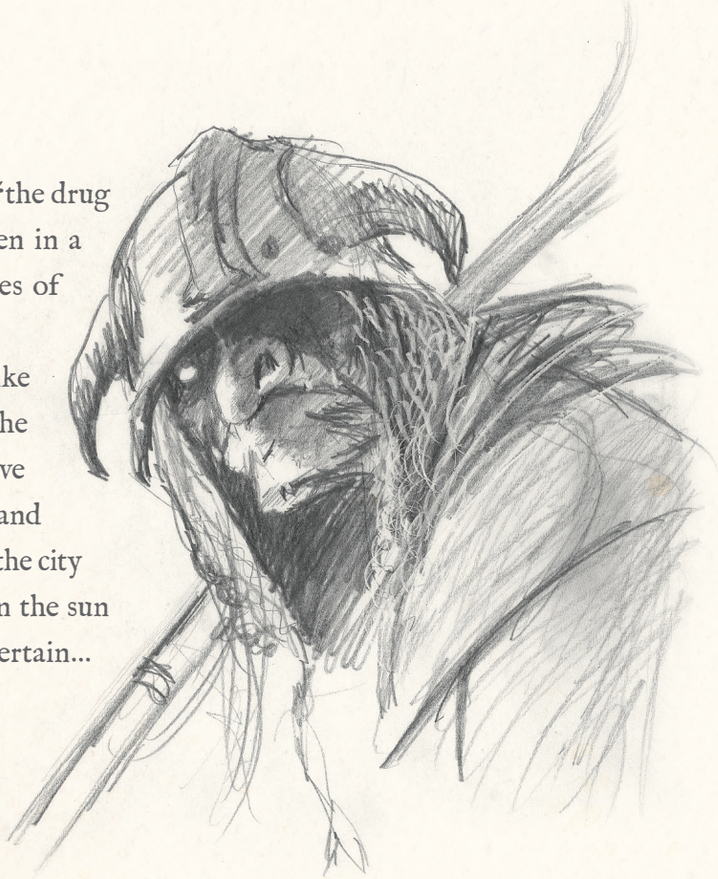
Tightly packed together stood the great orcs of the Howling Mountains, the Shokots and the Obrolhos, the Hounds and the Mishs, yesterday's enemies, side by side, silently awaiting orders to attack.

When the pale dawn drove the sisters of darkness towards the horizon, they are said to have turned red as the Barengborg hordes swept across the plain.

The view from the citadel walls showed the earth darkening as far as the eye could see, under the black and rumbling flood of what the old and hardened fighters called, with a touch of superstition and terror, "the scourge of men," the Black Death.

The shaman chiefs, driven crazy by "the drug of madness" called Amok, led their men in a furious, howling horde toward the gates of the sapphire city...

The first two lines of attack crashed like a monstrous wave against the walls of the fortified city. But when the order to move was given to the gargans, the monstrous and terrifying dragon-rams, the defenders of the city felt their courage melt away like snow in the sun because the outcome of the battle was certain...



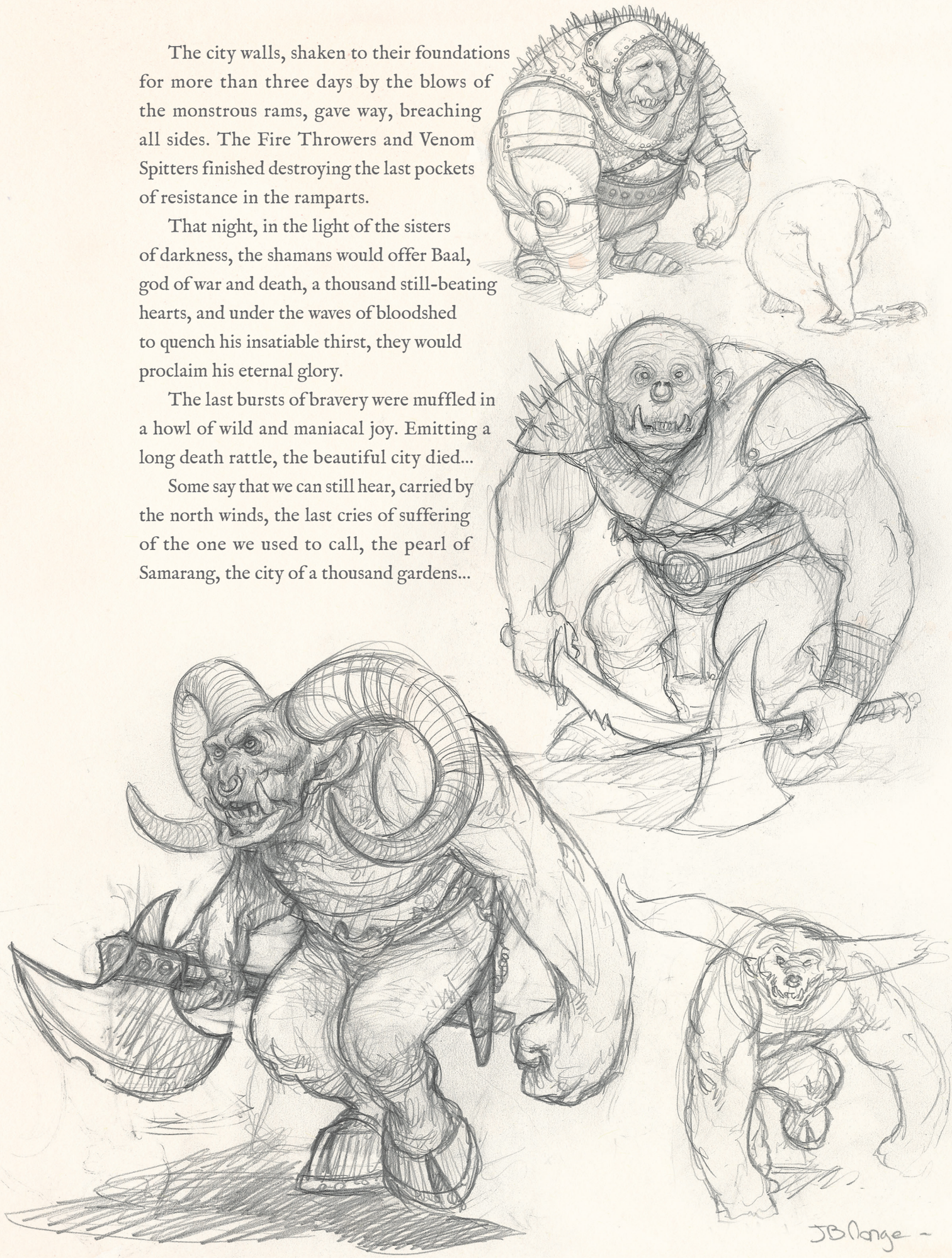
DEMARE

The city walls, shaken to their foundations for more than three days by the blows of the monstrous rams, gave way, breaching all sides. The Fire Throwers and Venom Spitters finished destroying the last pockets of resistance in the ramparts.

That night, in the light of the sisters of darkness, the shamans would offer Baal, god of war and death, a thousand still-beating hearts, and under the waves of bloodshed to quench his insatiable thirst, they would proclaim his eternal glory.

The last bursts of bravery were muffled in a howl of wild and maniacal joy. Emitting a long death rattle, the beautiful city died...

Some say that we can still hear, carried by the north winds, the last cries of suffering of the one we used to call, the pearl of Samarang, the city of a thousand gardens...



TURIN 06

-ANDREAS

Gilead, the city in the sky

Standing in the back castle of the princely palace, Ymir Von Aspen watched in thought as the sparkling tops of the silver towers of the City in the Sky glistened in the evening sun.

It would be a long way back to the cold kingdom of Kalderon, where she had been the reigning princess since the death of the beloved King Gundar III. She thought back to her arrival in the city. When she saw the overwhelming mass of the gigantic rocky perch where the marvelous city Gilead stood on the horizon, she was breathless. She was welcomed with all the respect due to her rank, and well beyond all her expectations.

The harsh, cold kingdom of Kalderon was a far cry from the splendor of the southern cities with their gentle and fragrant ways. Her native land, covered with snow and ice most of the time, left little room for the delicate dreams of a sixteen-year-old princess. For two long and wonderful weeks she had been the object of all attention. The memory of walks in the magnificent hanging gardens, the sumptuous feasts in the palaces of the city, and even the tireless lessons given to her by the young and charming aristocrats would be of great comfort and would fill the boredom of the journey home.

When night came, the deck lanterns lit up. The princess was seated with the captain and officers of the flying palace, and the evening wore on slowly. Much later, as she said goodbye to her hosts before retiring to her cabin, she took one last look over the rail. Far below, she could see the bow lights of her escort's longships dancing, glittering on the black carpet of the ocean...

The raucous sound of an alarm horn tore through the serene early morning tranquility. Awakened with a start and still numb from sleep, Ymir opened her cabin door to stare in disbelief at the furious excitement on the deck of the flying ship. The crewmen ran around, the officers shouted orders to servants who bustled around the huge crossbows, putting all their energy into stretching the oversized bows, sweating and grunting under the weight of the impressive bolts as big as tree trunks.

The blazing sun was suddenly blocked by a gigantic shadow. But before Ymir could figure out why, a huge mass fell on the bridge. Under the violence of the impact, the princess and all the sailors present were thrown to the ground. An incredible roar then covered all the screams, and Ymir, looking up, gazed in horror at the one who had attacked them. A monstrous dragon pounced on the ship, entangling itself in the shrouds and destroying most of the stern. A general panic seized the ship. The beast then spat fire, setting the ropes and the waxed woodwork of the deck ablaze. Ymir, in total terror, observed scenes of madness. Some sailors, drunk with rage, rushed at the beast, axe or spear in hand; others, like living fireworks, threw themselves into the void. The roar of the inferno and the dragon's shrieks were deafening. The flames danced before their eyes, crawling up the shrouds until they licked the sail of the gigantic balloon. The magnificent flying vessel, flagship of Gilead's fleet, howled in pain like a wounded beast in agony. She felt a burning breath on her face when, in a huge blaze, the balloon's canvas burst into flames.

As the flames surrounded her on all sides, Ymir's thoughts drifted to the cold lands of the homeland she would never see again. An immense sadness gripped her heart at the thought that she would never rest beside her father, under the snow, in the icy land of Kalderon. She felt the fire lick the silk of her garment and closed her eyes to this hell. Her lips parted and in a soft whisper she sang the song of the dead of her people...

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO

IN HARMONY WITH DRAGONS

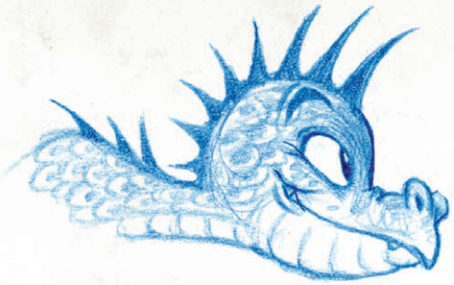
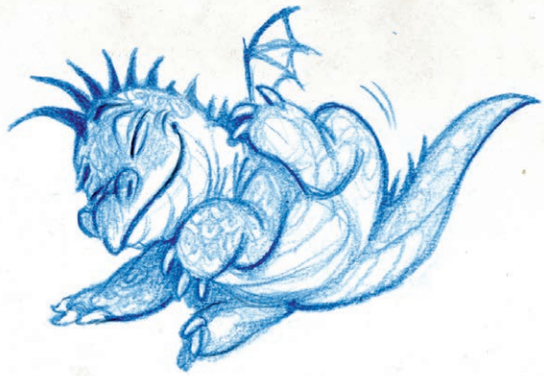
Many are in dark ignorance of ancient times. In the very distant past, the elves lived in peace and tranquility. It wasn't long before they crossed paths with the first dragons, but for centuries fear prevented any relationship between the two species. The cohabitation of elves and dragons required a long learning process of each other's needs. Over the millennia a balance was established between these beings particularly sensitive to their environment.

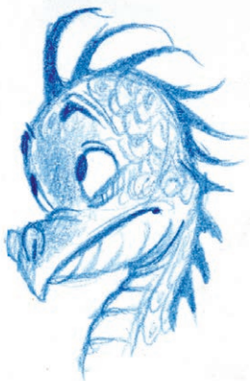
The ancient elves, the Venerable Ones, mastered the art of healing. They bandaged wounds, repaired broken claws, and replaced damaged scales. Their balms and magic also allowed them to fight against the deformities, such as an enlarged wing, of some dragons. Only the lone dragons, too proud, refused help from the elves.

The company of dragons was valuable in many ways: their ability to fly facilitated the protection of the territory, their strength allowed the transport of heavy objects, and their presence terrified the most ferocious predators.

The ancient dragons and the Venerable Ones exchanged their age-old knowledge. Every day, the elves composed songs and poems in honor of their precious allies. Legends say that the elves introduced the dragons to the joys of tobacco, wine, music, long naps in the sun, and chess. But there is no evidence of this nonsense, except for a few images taken from the *"Spellbook of Ancient Times."*

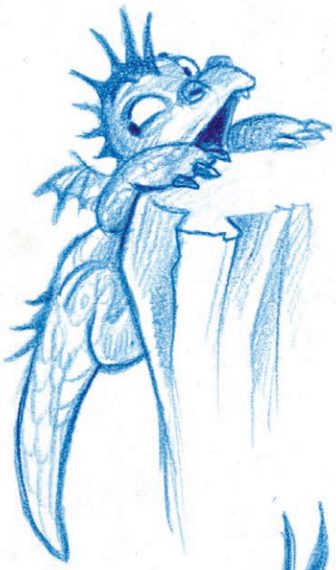
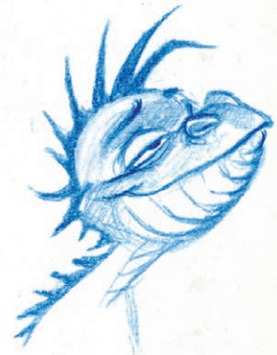
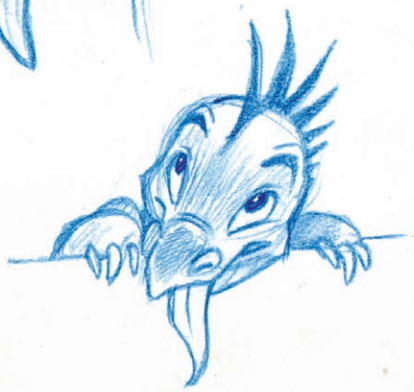
These dragons agreed to leave their infants under the protection of the Venerable Ones. They bottle-fed them and raised them with the elven children.

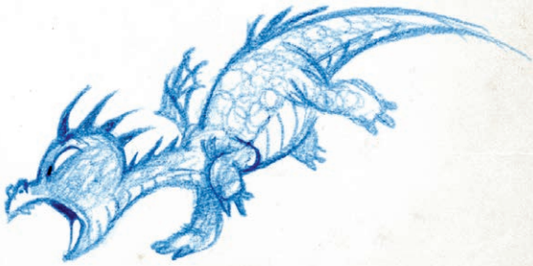





The dragonlings were presented to the elder dragons every full moon to ensure their proper development. Those who refused to live with the elves were returned to their community. The same was done with baby dragons who had behavioral problems. If the child refused to communicate with the elves or struck them, it was returned to its family. As for those who rejected other baby dragons, they would no doubt become lone dragons, commonly known as wild dragons, and would settle in isolated territories, in dark caves or underground. Some dragon cubs became so close to baby elves that their spirits were forever linked. They did not choose each other; an invisible and mysterious bond united them. This magical union would only be broken by the death of one of them. They were called the "Inseparables."

Most of the dragon cubs were raised in groups, while others were more solitary and needed space, peace and quiet, and the ability to fly freely at all times. Without exception, all dragon cubs needed a lot of attention. Elves and dragons communicated by simple gestures, thoughts, and words. However, the first contact was the most important. The dragon cub would only agree to be approached after a long period of observation, but once it gained trust, it would agree to be cuddled, played with, and even cleaned. Dragons by nature are not very expressive. Anger or fear usually manifested itself only as a light smoke billowing from its mouth and nostrils.



Only the most experienced elves knew how to interpret even the slightest unusual sign in baby dragons, such as nervousness.

The Venerable Ones taught the dragonlings to breathe fire. They had to control their breathing and master the intensity of the flames they shot. Once trained, the dragon cub could spit simple fireballs or a continuous, intense stream of flames. It was not uncommon for elves to be burned during these exercises. Balms made of now-extinct herbs were used to soothe their pain.

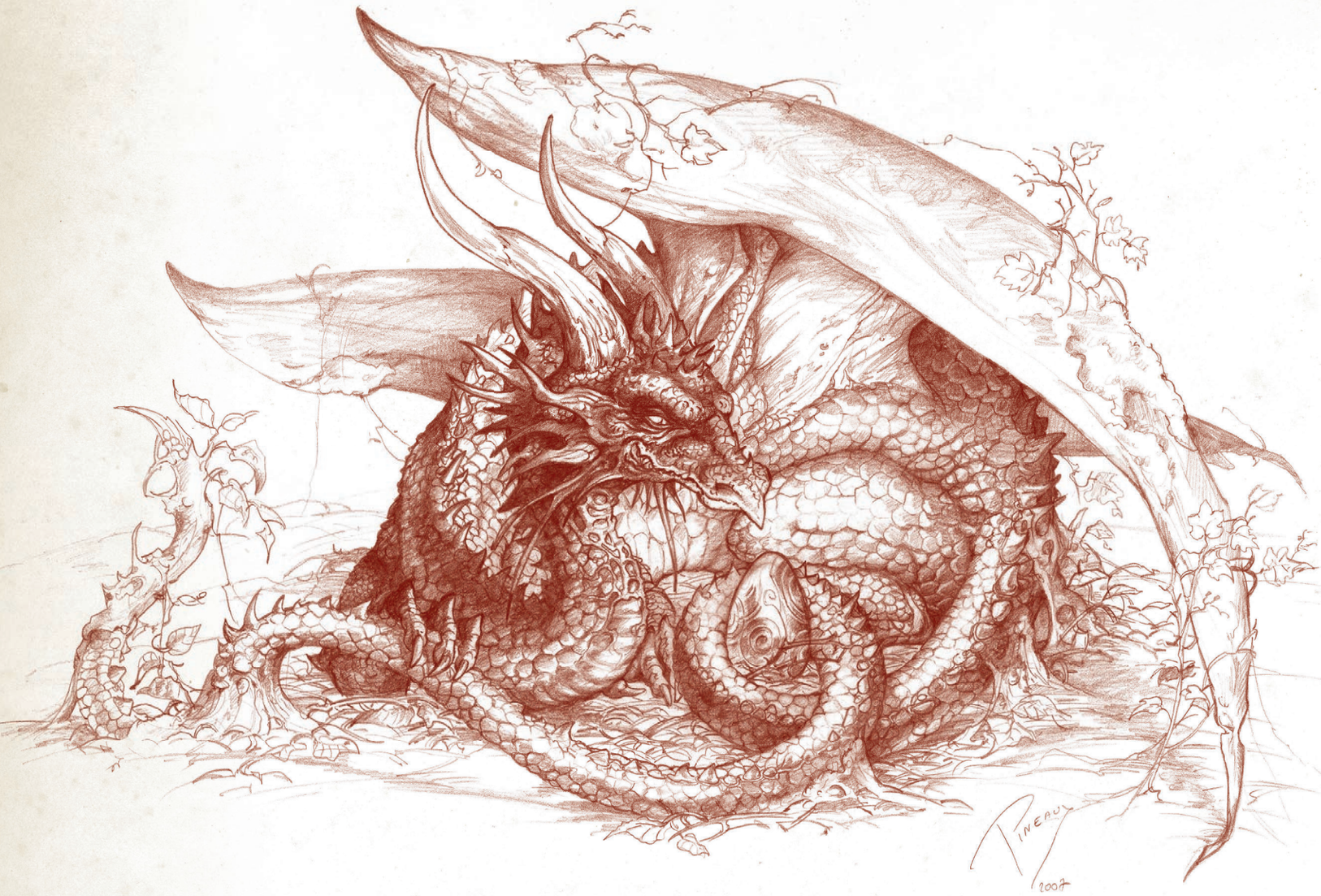
The Venerable Ones also taught the baby dragons the art of flying. They had to teach them how to move their wings. The first flights were often accompanied by nasty injuries as the baby dragons' scales were not yet strong enough to fully protect them. Then they would try to coordinate the movement of their wings and tail. Their tails were like rudders, allowing them to go up or down quickly, to turn left or right. Only after long centuries could the dragon use its tail as a formidable weapon in aerial combat.

Most of all, dragons loved to hatch their eggs. They were alternately guarded by mother and father, while the other was hunting. It's a rare exception that dragons reject their eggs. The ancient dragons would then entrust them to the Venerable Ones. The same was true if the parents died before the eggs hatched. To keep the eggs at a constant temperature, the elves created fireplaces to incubate them. With bellows, the elves maintained a strong and continuous fire that was essential for the survival of the baby dragon. Some Venerable Ones thought that temperature variations could influence the sex of the dragon.

DUNGEON
t.diterizzi

Through the process of studying and caring for dragons, the Venerable Ones perfectly understood their anatomy and how they moved. This extraordinary knowledge allowed them to help their friends, but also to defeat the lone dragons that attacked their territory. With a single arrow, they could slay even the most powerful dragon.

Only the elves had a close relationship with the dragons. Orcs and humans wanted to become their masters. In an attempt to make them submit to their will, the orcs did not hesitate to torture them.



They had tried to domesticate them at first, thinking they were breeding a simple animal, a mindless wild creature. Far from being docile and blessed with remarkable intelligence, dragons proved to be formidable enemies. Over the centuries, their methods had failed one after the other, with the exception of the most widely used and popular drug among orcs: Amok. The dragon's mind under the influence of this drug was immediately plunged into total darkness. It became a mere puppet at the hands of their master. Without them, the dragon was nothing more than an inert mass that would die of hunger and thirst, unable to provide for its most basic needs. Even the elves' powerful magic was rarely able to combat the devastating effects of Amok.

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ÖZMER
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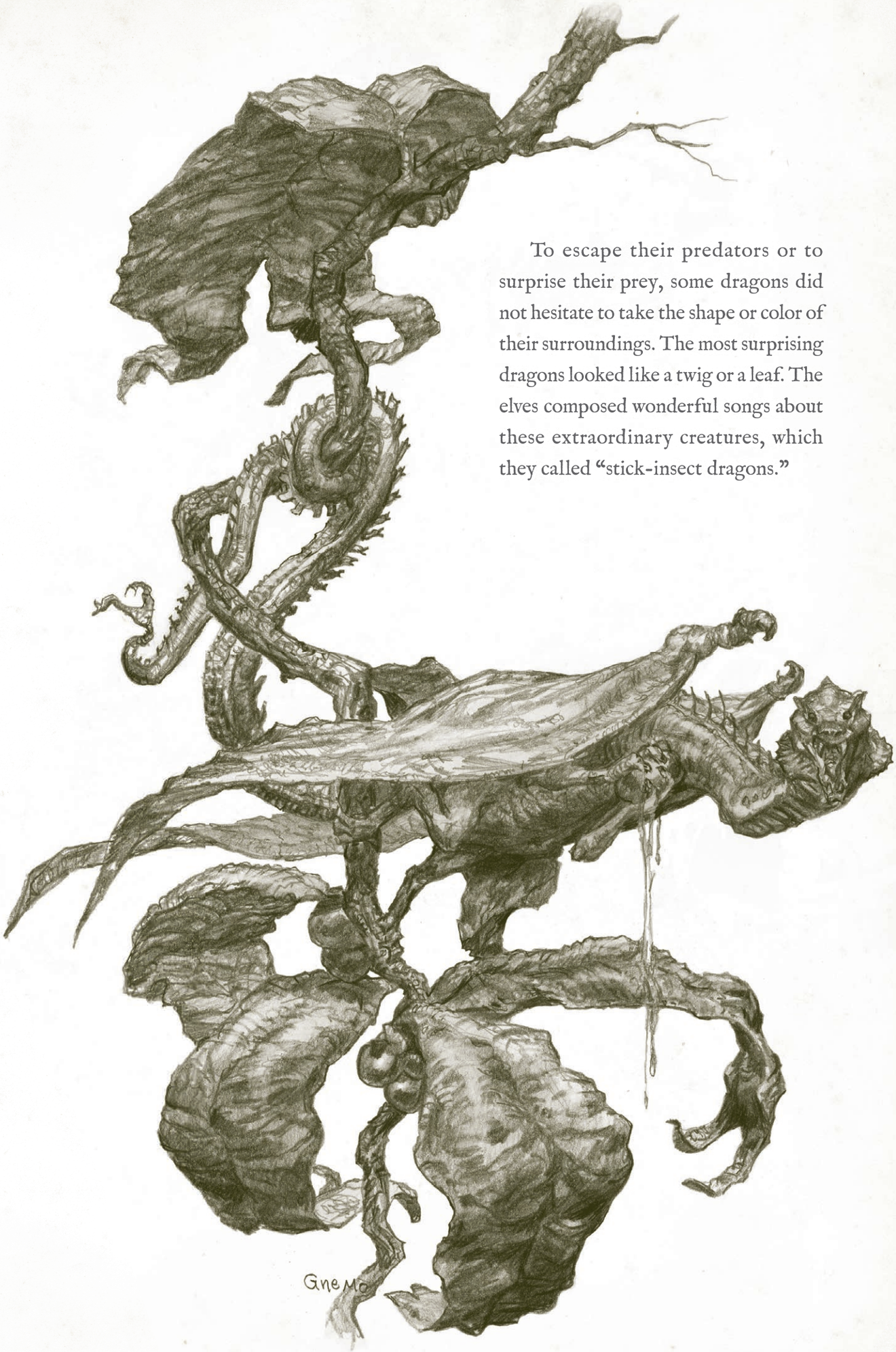


To escape their predators or to surprise their prey, some dragons did not hesitate to take the shape or color of their surroundings. The most surprising dragons looked like a twig or a leaf. The elves composed wonderful songs about these extraordinary creatures, which they called "stick-insect dragons."

The Almanean forest served as a shelter for dragons and elves for several millennia. There they found food, a mild climate, and, above all, a community whose members depended on each other.

A few hunters attempted to steal dragon eggs...much to their misfortune!

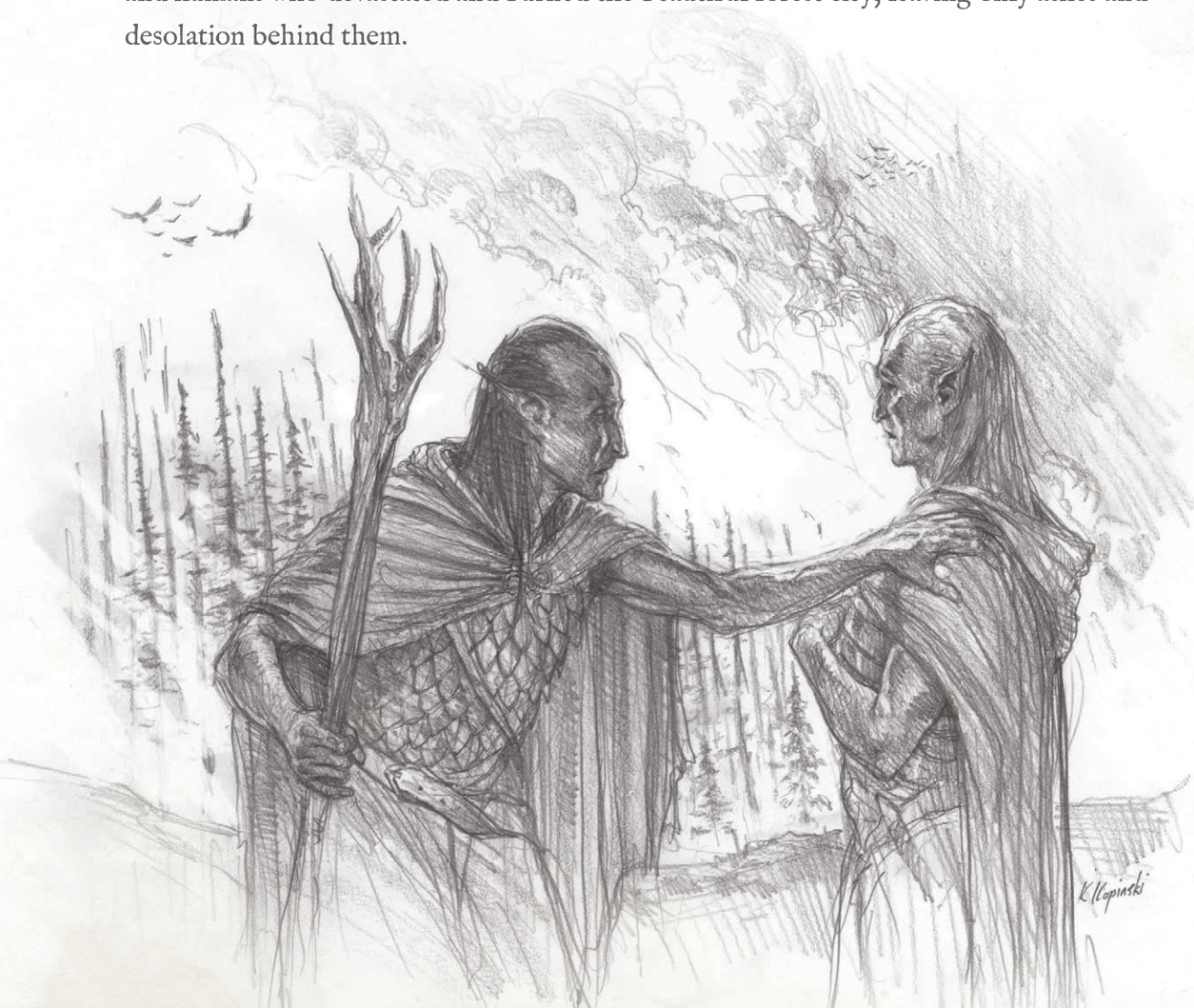
PAUL BONNER

THE SEA DRAGONS

You probably won't believe me, but in the depths of the oceans where darkness, cold, and silence reign, there once lived a community of extraordinary elves and dragons. Few still remember their great migration from the Almanean forest to the abyss.

Since time immemorial, hidden in the heart of this splendid and deep forest, they had lived in perfect harmony with the animals and the thousand-year-old trees. These magnificent elves, with their pale skin, delicate features, and long hair, usually rode on their mighty dragons. These wise people shunned other races who, in their eyes, sought only power and destruction at the expense of precious Mother Nature.

Once so peaceful, their kingdom was now plunged into chaos. In those sad days, orcs and men fought a merciless war, spawning horrors and violence for reasons that have since been forgotten. A terrible battle took place in the Almanean forest. Unfortunately, the elves' magic was not enough to protect their floral fortress from the madness of the orcs and humans who devastated and burned the beautiful forest city, leaving only ashes and desolation behind them.



Silent and with hearts full of sorrow, the elves and their precious dragons resigned themselves to leave their former home, pushing westward to the Eryean coast. They decided to seek their past harmony in the abyss, where none of them had ever ventured. They are believed to have reached the shores of Erye after a seven-day march.

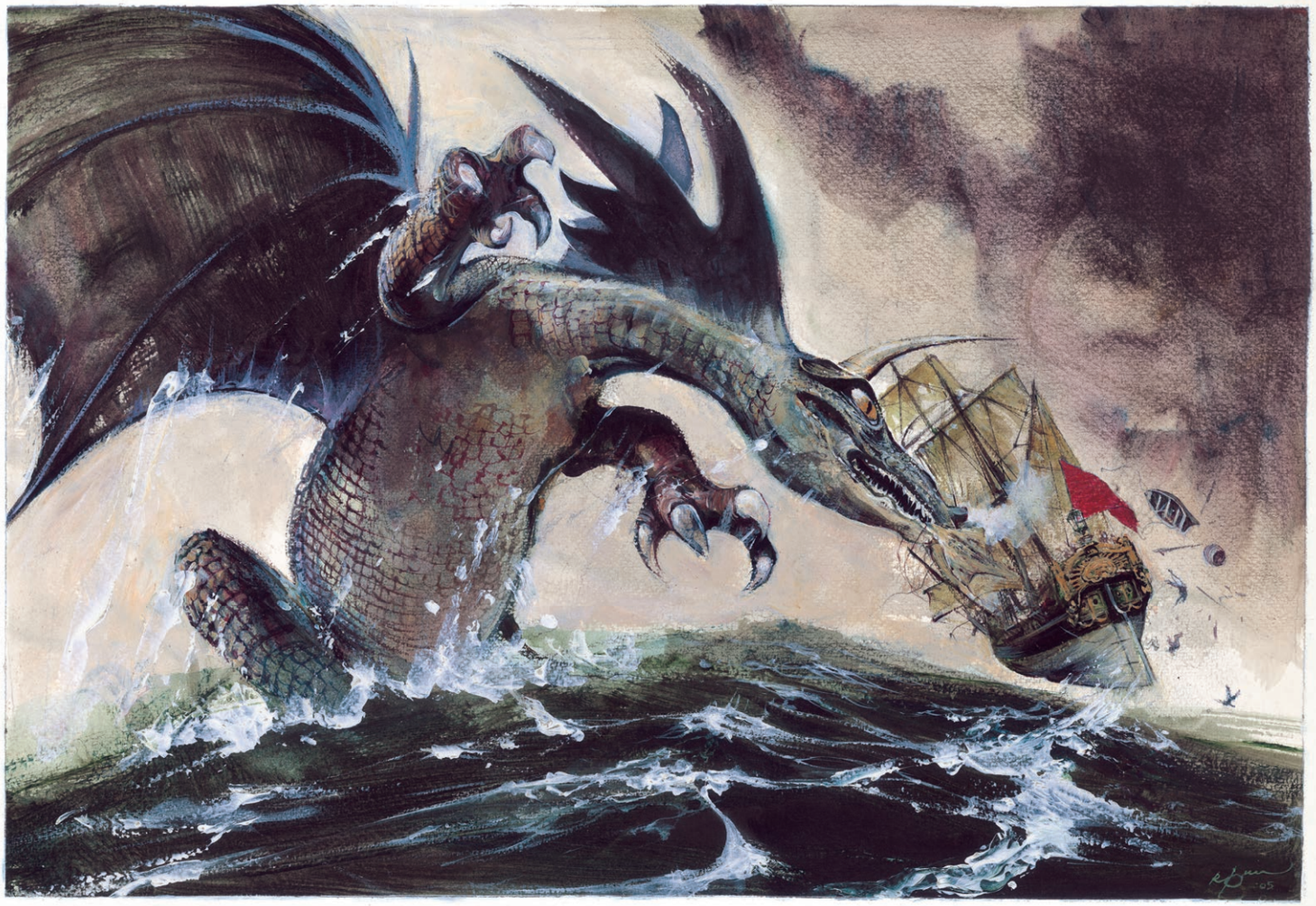
Eyes narrowed, they gazed at the sun setting the horizon ablaze for the last time. Orange shimmers danced on the calm sea. They slowly crossed a sandy beach, slipped gently into the water, then swam gracefully to the abyssal depths.

Quite naturally, in order to adapt to their new habitat, the bodies of the elves and dragons underwent profound changes, accelerated by the magic of the Ancient Ones. Thus, they grew organs and gills that allowed them to live in these extreme, even hostile conditions. Their bodies were transformed so profoundly that moving, feeding, reproducing, communicating, and breathing underwater became easy. The elves' skin became covered with scales and a light webbing formed between the fingers of their hands and feet, facilitating their movement in the water and allowing them to swim very quickly.

From then on, the oceans were home to the most astounding dragons, for their morphology differed radically from that of other dragons. In this abyssal darkness, some became blind, while others saw their eyes widen until they bulged, allowing them to perceive the tiniest particle of light. The scales of the most incredible dragons radiated a bluish or white halo. Sea dragons were very fast and attacked their prey not with flames, but with jets of bubbling water. Most of them had razor sharp hook-shaped teeth, which were useful in holding their victims... Make no mistake, the lords of the Abyss were now the dragons!

To combat the perpetual darkness, the elves built a vast, glittering city from phosphorescent algae, blocks of crystals, and powerful spells: Aril Del. Brighter than the sun, it blinded and repelled the most monstrous creatures of the ocean floor. It seems that the magic of the elves and dragons required a lot of energy, which they drew from the hot springs that ran through the abyss. These underwater volcanoes, similar to geysers, served as nests for the dragons who laid their eggs around the burning rocks, thus protecting them from all predators.

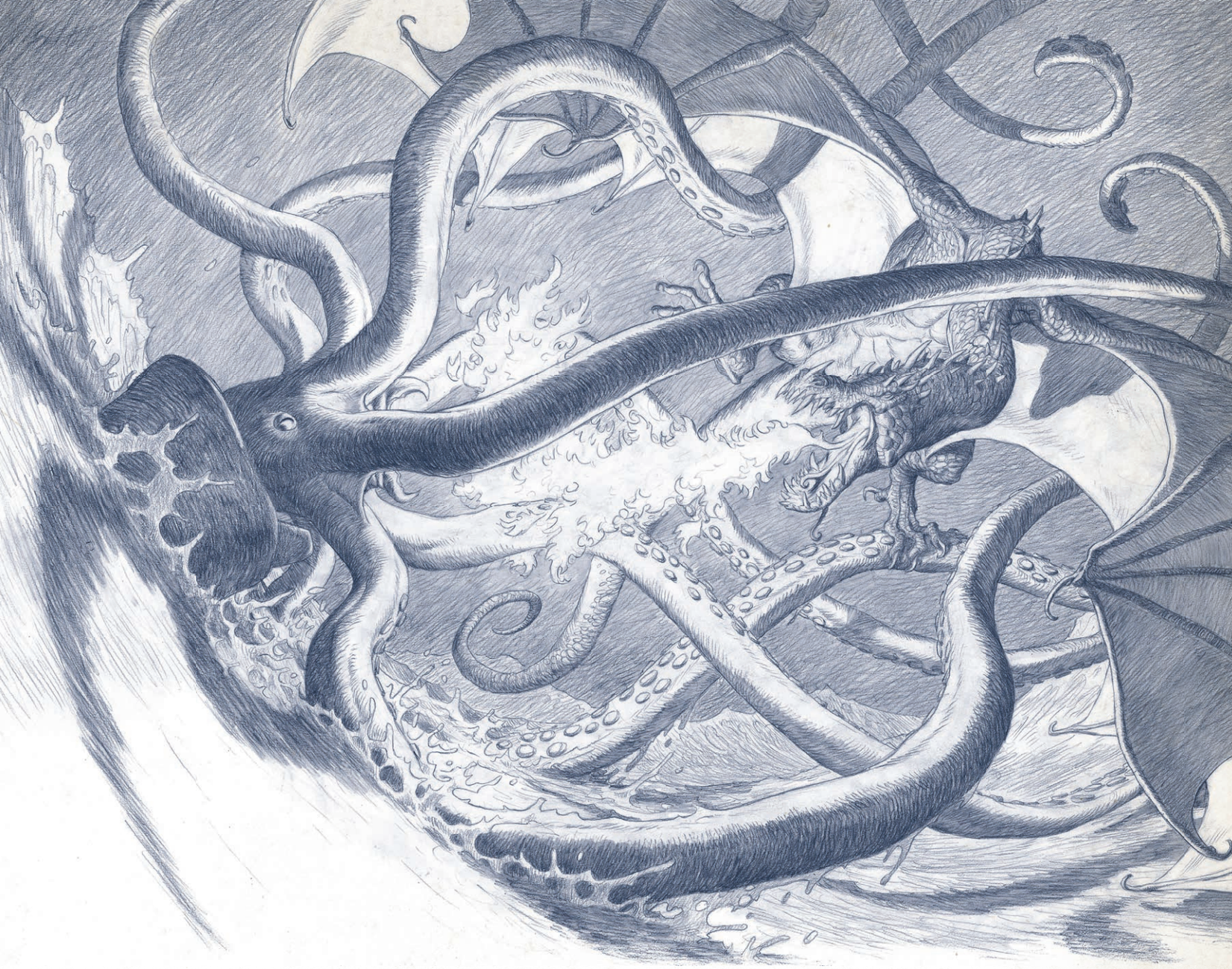
Armed with tridents, the elves organized patrols and fought alongside the dragons. They communicated by either thought or by ultrasonic waves. Now, when the elves rode their dragons, they moved with such ease and flexibility that they seemed to become one. They rarely went to the surface and hardly ever approached the coast.



However, they did not hesitate to rescue shipwrecked humans who floated to the surface, and drop them off on the nearest beach, with the exception of the orcs whom they left for dead. If they were elves, they always invited them to join their aquatic community. If they refused, they took them back to their own.

LOCKWOOD

©B. Carletto



For a long time, I overlooked that these aquatic territories, which I believed to be calm and peaceful, were in fact very inhospitable. Terrifying predators roamed the ocean floor in search of food: whale sharks, sea snakes, krakens, and moray eels; but the gigantic size of the dragons and their massive jaws lined with sharp teeth made them feared adversaries and the abyss was an ideal hunting ground! There was nothing more impressive in the world than a fight between a kraken and an abyss dragon. Only an abyss dragon could dare to attack a creature of such power and ferocity. Their titanic clashes caused tidal waves and whirlwinds of unparalleled violence. The elves tended to the wounded dragons, healing their scars and the burns caused by the gigantic tentacles of the monstrous beasts.

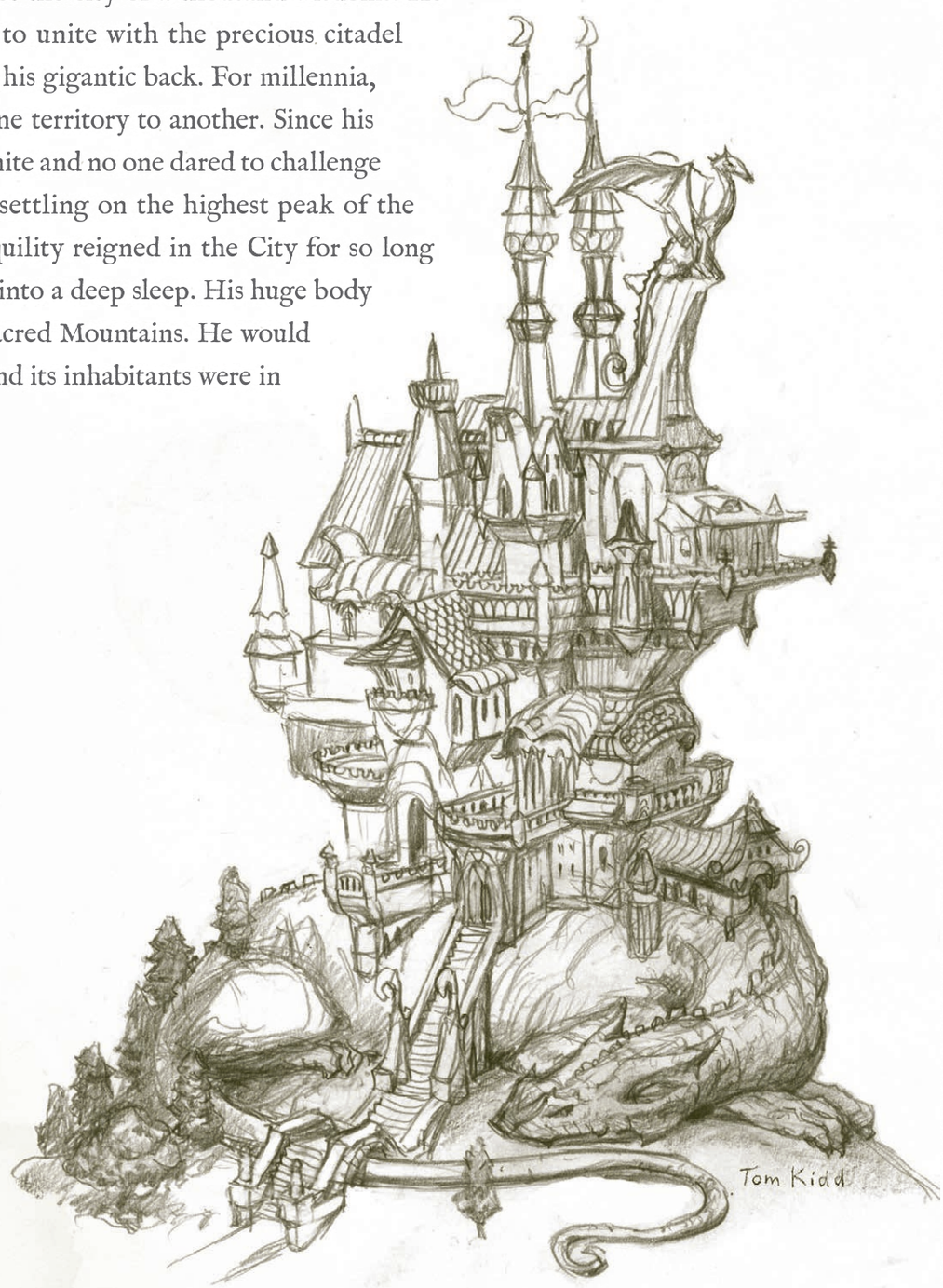
Legend has it that after one of these terrible battles, a dragon named Nassah felt such intense pain that madness overtook his mind. He became a savage creature who would constantly chase boats and smash them against the reefs. He also attacked dragons that flew over the oceans, and many port cities suffered his wrath. One day, to everyone's relief, he disappeared, and no one knew what happened to him...

Excerpt from the
"TREATY OF THE
ABYSS DRAGONS"
From RANLOR,
Keeper of the Library
of Beldera the Great.

ROSS BACH

THE DRAGON AND THE CITY

The legend of this dragon is inseparable from that of the City of Magi. Son of the ancient dragons, he drew his power from the earth. Broader and taller than the other dragons, he was chosen to protect the city of a thousand wisdoms. He decided to unite with the precious citadel forever by carrying it on his gigantic back. For millennia, he transported it from one territory to another. Since his love for the City was infinite and no one dared to challenge his power, he ended up settling on the highest peak of the highest mountain. Tranquility reigned in the City for so long that he ended up falling into a deep sleep. His huge body was now frozen in the Sacred Mountains. He would only awaken if the city and its inhabitants were in any danger.



THE WILD HERD

Formation flying is very rare for dragons. These huge creatures have been hovering over the sea for several days in search of new lands, letting themselves be carried by the rising winds, content to direct their movements with their gigantic wings and powerful tails. These dragons are particularly hungry after this long journey, and few can dive into the water to catch fish. Now that they fly over vast plains and high mountains, they are eager to flush out game. Despite their heavy weight, their keen eyesight, and powerful wing flapping will allow them to swoop down on their prey very quickly. At the last moment, they'll reduce their speed by spreading their large wings, then grab them with their claws. After devouring their victims, they will fly away in search of a deep, dark cave. Dragons are powerful but not invincible, which is why they constantly watch over each other. Once they choose their territory, they will obsessively protect it and become terrible predators. These dragons will then form a real horde that will fall on all kingdoms to feed, and, above all, to amass immeasurable wealth.

THE BROWN MOUNTAINS

The sea called our brothers and sisters. We, the Almanean elves, were now guests in the highest, most hostile mountains of our world, the Brown Mountains, inaccessible to humans and orcs, those creatures always so quick to take a life. Every day, every night, we missed the forest where we were born. It was the first refuge of our people and we had lived there in perfect harmony with our friends, the dragons, for centuries. Only the strongest of us survived the climb up the Brown Mountains. These staggering peaks were perpetually shrouded in darkness. Freezing winds swept down the slopes covered with a thick layer of snow and ice. Fortunately, the dragons' mighty fire managed to create the heat necessary for our survival and to illuminate these cold and dark mountains. Without the help of our companions, it would have been impossible for us to weather the snowstorms and fall asleep without risking certain death.

Throughout the ascent, our bruised bodies screamed in pain. Under the biting cold, breathing was an infinitely excruciating effort. We were constantly subjected to violent gusts of wind and had to cross icy crevasses and steep slopes with great difficulty. Many of our people died on this long journey. Others got lost in this real labyrinth, bathed in darkness.

Over the generations, we were able to develop our breathing abilities. Our fur and hair grew, giving us wonderful protection against the frost. Our knowledge led to some members of our community to grow wings, allowing them to move more easily in these steep territories. The change in altitude and temperature was accompanied by amazing transformations in the dragons. Some saw their scales covered with a beautiful white coat. This precious fur was real camouflage: no predator, no prey, could see them.

This seemingly deserted region was a hunting ground for wild beasts: great eagles, wolves, trolls, black bears, and white saber-toothed tigers. To our great misfortune, we had to face the most monstrous creatures the mountains had ever borne: the lone dragons. Their power was matched only by their cruelty, and it was difficult to survive their attacks. We no longer had the wise counsel of the Venerable Ones to help us. We lost many brave warriors in these terrible battles, and many winged companions lost their lives. The wild dragons mysteriously vanished from the Brown Mountains, and our people could finally enjoy a long period of happiness and tranquility.

Due to the freezing temperatures, many dragon eggs didn't hatch. In order for them to hatch properly, the dragons had to incubate their eggs to keep them at a constant warm temperature.

J.Baptiste Monge

Fortunately, we no longer encountered humans, orcs, and other creatures that lived at low altitudes. If they attempted to climb the Brown Mountains, they would surely lose their lives. We could never have imagined that in these high mountains there could be bodies of ice water larger than the Onian seas and huge cities devoid of life. There was no doubt these mountains hid many other mysteries...

Even in the summer, life was harsh, with snowstorms lasting many moons. As soon as it fell, the snow turned to ice. Summer and winter alike, finding food was a constant struggle, but life was mostly peaceful, nonetheless. Our friends had become the Lords of these icy spires. Clinging to the highest peaks, they contemplated the twinkling stars and regarded their ice kingdom with the greatest tenderness. Our Community tamed these mountains of eternal snow. Our determination gave us the strength to go all the way and we found in the Sacred Mountains what we wanted more than anything: solitude and silence!

THE DRAGON WEDDING

A wedding is supposed to be the most beautiful day in a woman's life, but it can also be the saddest. In the heart of the most peaceful of villages, a young woman, enrobed in a dress whiter than snow and adorned with an extravagant crown of flowers, celebrated her wedding in joy and happiness, surrounded by her family and friends. Unfortunately, after surrounding the village, marauding orc raiders set out to burn down houses and slaughter men, women, and children. These monsters left the village dead, where burned bodies lay scattered in the still-smoldering ruins. Legend has it that the spirit of the deceased bride, a symbol of purity and gentleness, came to earth to deliver the dragons captured by the orcs. She did not speak a word, just breaking the strongest chains and leading her followers to secluded places. The dragons bowed to their protector before she vanished into the daylight in a halo of golden rays. May she always appear where the dragons need her!

.2007 ©

JJR

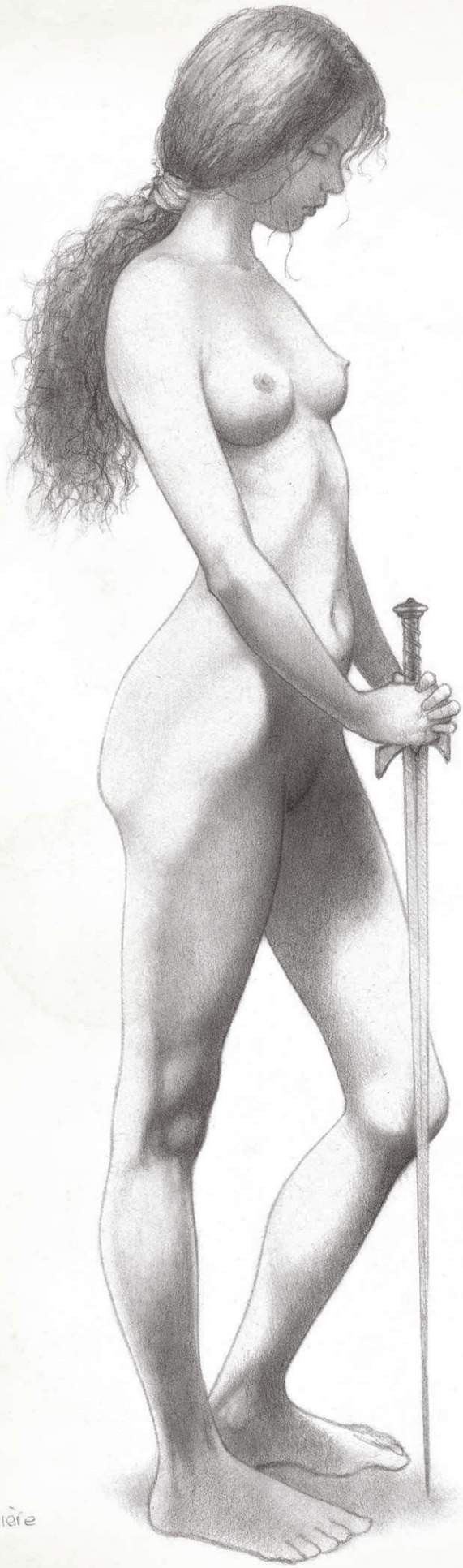
THE NEW DRAGON

The most important thing in life, my father told me, was to always strive for wealth... I tried to make my fortune by becoming a mighty warrior. At the age of sixteen I joined the army, but I must admit that I was a poor soldier. Deemed unfit for combat, I had to do several odd jobs: peddler, butcher, doctor... Nothing helped, luck didn't seem to want to smile at me.

With the market for religion booming and the fear of dragons rampant, I decided to create the "Order of the New Dragon" and be its Supreme Leader. I quickly discovered the keys to success: a sanctuary, bad omens, a few sacrifices, and weak minds. With the last of my savings, I bought a small stone building decorated with dragon carvings, and "suggested" to my followers that if they did not believe in our God, the New Dragon, they would all burn to death.

JUSTIN OO

Incredibly, followers come from the farthest realms to listen to my sermons. I find them boring: "Hear our prayers, O mighty dragon! Have mercy on your poor followers" blah blah blah...but they love them and are very generous. I don't even have to strip them of their possessions, they give them freely. Of course, the New Dragon approves of all donations, whether in gold or in kind.



My movement has several thousand followers and hundreds of churches. There is no lack of gullible people. Even the most powerful kings court me; I have become an indispensable spiritual advisor in these dark times.

In my wildest dreams, I never imagined that one day my status as Supreme Leader and my wonderful charisma would allow me to maintain special relationships with the most beautiful women and the most beautiful goblins. Dragoluia!

My order has suffered a few smear campaigns, but it was enough for me to offer small gifts to the local authorities to calm most minds.

To attract more and more followers, I had a great idea. All I have to do is convert heroes or artists to my religion. I recently converted the popular and charismatic tragedian, Crotuisem. The effects were immediate: I had a more than 20% increase in female worshipers.

VINK

MacDougall 08

In order to spread the word of the New Dragon, I had to modernize my communication techniques and, above all, train priests. I codified their education very strictly. They must first learn not to fear dragons. They must feed them, clean their excrement, and sleep next to them. This is a high-risk apprenticeship; it is not uncommon for one of my students to lose a limb or their life. Next, I teach them that fasting is an essential step in understanding the beliefs of the New Dragon. This rule is one of my favorites, as it is a great source of savings. My apprentices must also learn to brew potions from weeds in front of hundreds of followers. These concoctions have unsuspected virtues. You speak cryptic words, pour the contents into small vials, and you can sell them to the faithful for the modest price of two cents. For these sales to be successful, you must use an old pot and dragon's breath to create a fog. I've noticed that you sell twice as much if the fog is thick.

Finally—and this is the prerequisite for becoming one of my priests—the student must master the art of sacrifice. Those who are far too sensitive will never be able to act and will have to be content to hand out little guides to the New Dragon. That's why it's best to train them from an early age.

From time to time, minor incidents occur. In one of my wonderful sanctuaries near the ochre mountains, a dragon had escaped and devoured all the inhabitants of a nearby village. I was very saddened by this tragic event. I must say this creature cost me a fortune.

I am trying to establish a new church near the Azure coast. The weather is always sunny, the sand fine and the sea soft and salty. I am thinking of holding seminars or meditating there during the warm seasons. Being a Supreme Guide is not a simple role, it is a real priesthood.

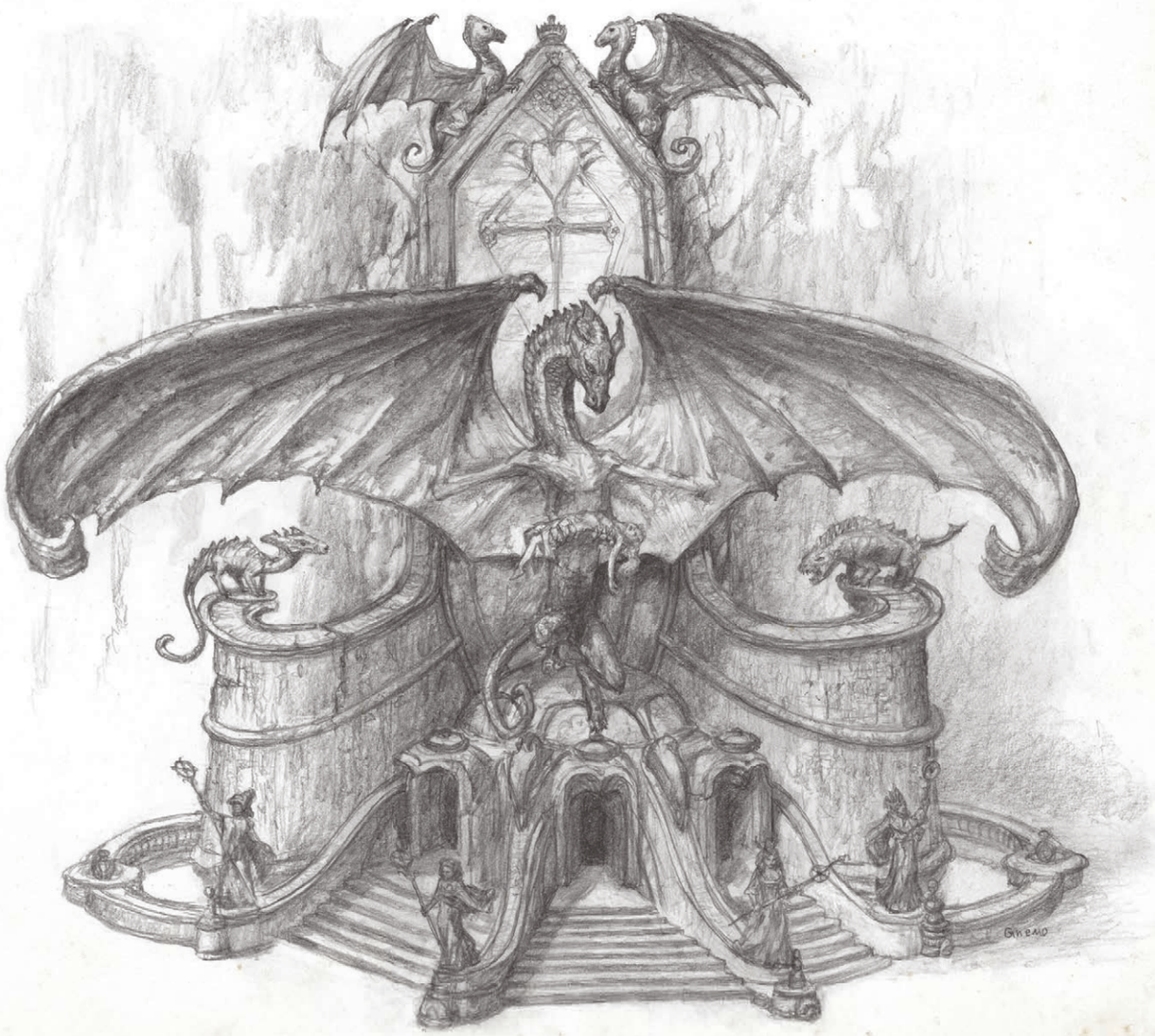
SCOAJMORE 07

Thomas Kidd ©1988

I must set an example for my disciples.

Gurus who encourage their community members to kill themselves are fools. They really don't get it. A living believer is a follower who brings in money! Speaking of money, I have to pay mercenaries a lot of it to capture dragons. I despise these creatures with their foul breath and insatiable appetite, but their presence has a great effect on my subjects during ceremonies. My soldiers also eliminate some competitors. Last I heard, members of the "Sect of Snakes" and "Cult of Ghouls" have mysteriously disappeared.

You can't imagine how good it feels to be drowning in gold. My small business is not concerned about crisis, it crosses all borders, and does not care about race. Well, I'll leave you to it, I still have so many gullible people to convert. Go on. May the New Dragon be with you, and especially with me!



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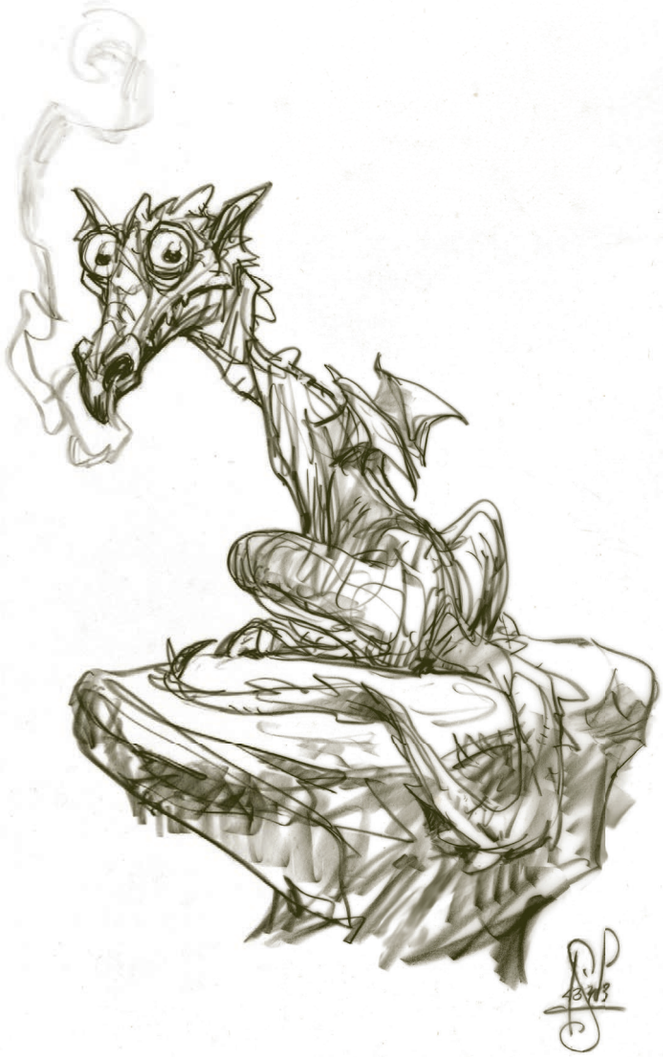

DRAGONS. They reign above the eternal snows or in the depths of the abyss... They are marvelous, magical, malicious creatures... But where do these winged creatures with sparkling scales and fearsome claws come from?

This collection of illustrations on the theme of dragons brings together the best illustrators and comic book authors from around the world. The result is this illustrated encyclopedia, which combines an extraordinary history of dragons with gorgeous, fully painted art, captures every majestic and fearsome detail of these wonderful scaly behemoths!

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